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APROPOS  
OF  
DOLORES

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## P R E F A T O R Y N O T E

EVERY character and every event in this novel is fictitious, and any coincidence with the name or conduct or circumstance of any living person is unintentional. In this repudiation the author must include himself. The story is told in the first person but the voice is the voice of an invented personality – however lifelike and self-conscious it may seem. Never will the author proceed against his publisher for libel. He has no claim. Stephen Wilbeck is no more an auto-libel on the present writer than Tristram Shandy was an auto-libel on Laurence Sterne. Sterne knew his Tristram was different and meant him to be different, not only in circumstances but in quality, and that is the case with the author of every novel told in the first person.

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#### P R E F A T O R Y N O T E

train or from some odd phrase or thing reported in a newspaper. That is the way fiction is made and there is no other way. If a character in a book should have the luck to seem like a real human being that is no excuse for imagining an 'original' or suspecting a caricature. This is a story about happiness and about loneliness of spirit, told in good faith. Nothing in this book has happened to anyone; much in this book has happened to many people.

H. G. WELLS

A PROPOS  
OF  
DOLORES



## CHAPTER I

### HAPPY INTERLUDE

(*Portumere, August 2nd, 1934*)

#### § 1

I FIND myself happy and I have an impression that I have been quite happy for two days. And further I believe against the critical protests of my intelligence, that I have been generally happy throughout my life.

My intelligence does not deny flatly that this is so, but it demands an inquiry into the matter. It produces memories as disputing politicians exhume the past speeches of their adversaries. It raises this question with the faintly irritating air of entire impartiality. Will I explain? Quite recently, within the last fortnight, there was a mood when the years that lay before me presented themselves as a burthen too heavy to be borne, I saw my life as an inextricable muddle, and I repudiated suicide perhaps because it presented itself as an effort too troublesome to attempt, or perhaps, and so I remember I preferred to put it, because I was under obligation to various people who had stood by me and might be in a manner depending on me, not to confess that the life they had thought worth-while and found some comfort in, was a failure.

I still, after much disillusionment, cling to the

### A PROPOS OF DOLORES

belief that such fluctuations of mood as this ought to be more controllable than I find them. There has been no change in my circumstances to justify this vast contrast of feeling – indeed there has been no estimable change at all. I cannot say that I was either better off or worse off in any way during that dismal night. But that was three nights ago. And here amazingly I am back at contentment, finding the life in me and the things about me very good, and very gladly would I remain in this mood for the rest of my life.

As I run over the details of these two past agreeable days in my mind – these days that contrast so vividly with my night of depression – I am reminded more and more of the personality of Mr. James Boswell. I perceive that for a while I have been going about with much the same appreciative gusto, my mental eyes protruding. I have been living objectively. I have been extroverted. I have a Boswell self, I realize, and it is beyond doubt the happiest of all my selves. If I may bend a phrase from the spiritualists to my purpose, these last two days Boswell has been my control. Since I left Paris the day before yesterday my mind has made a thousand grateful notes, quite in the Boswell fashion, of the gestures of this great, slovenly, incoherent, foolishly wise, liberally disposed Tory Dr. Johnson of a world. I have kept myself and my own concerns not so much in the background as in their proper Boswellian place, inconspicuously in the foreground. I have been hardly more than where the camera happened to be in the spectacle.

## HAPPY INTERLUDE

I have caught myself under this Boswell influence before. In Paris, in London I have been a happy flâneur; I have flâné-d in New York and Washington and most of the great cities of Europe; but for some time I have been too preoccupied and too vexed for it, and never before have I been so conscious of the flâneur state of mind.

This pleasant escape to an all too infrequent mood culminated recognizably in the city of Rennes in the afternoon of the first day. I had left Paris a little before nine, and except that one of the brakes heated and smoked and had to be relieved at Verneuil, my little Voisin Fourteen had behaved beautifully on the road, passing everything without any appearance of hurry or competition, honking modestly and meekly, ‘please’, never making an unnecessary sound. Auguste had cleaned all the bougies and greased and oiled everything to perfection. It was not his fault that one of the brakes was just the slightest bit too tight. Dolores in a wrapper, by a great and obvious effort controlling her morbid affection for me to an only slightly unreasonable solicitude, had repeated her last unnecessary directions from the balcony. I was to be sure and do something – I didn’t catch what, but I promised. Probably not to go too fast. But what *is* too fast? I couldn’t go too fast away from Paris.

I had liked the man at the barrier who handed me my green ticket – my Voisin has a right-hand drive and we both had short arms and we thought it funny rather than annoying that we had to stretch to the

## A PROPOS OF DOLORES

utmost – and I had liked the two young men who filled up my tank outside Sèvres – I don't know why. One had a green and pink jumper and the other a crooked nose; perhaps it was that.

I was amused to find the pale old-fashioned majesty of Versailles set out, as it seemed, specially to adorn my progress and fading visibly in the sunlight. Mile after mile along the good straight western road a golden carpet of sunshine had been laid down for me, patterned with tree shadows; the fields were decorated with wheatsheafs regardless of expense, millions-worth of wheatsheafs; and the man at Verneuil who had come across the road to tell me my wheel was afire seemed like a guardian angel rather than a garagist.

He fixed it while I drank at the café across the way and I lunched in Alençon on mutton and beer (avoiding the tête de veau) and got to Rennes between four and five, making my way to the Hotel Moderne, whose name I found congenial, with unerring precision by means of the Michelin plan.

At one corner by a bridge over the Vilaine as I drove along the Quai I was stopped by a very good-looking police agent. I go in great fear of police agents and at the first movement of his white truncheon I pulled up and prepared to accept whatever contravention he thrust upon me. But he came to the side all apologetic smiles. He had thought M'sieu had no number in front but it was the dazzle of the sunshine had blinded him. He motioned me on, and I and the Voisin bowing radiantly went our way.

## HAPPY INTERLUDE

Everything was like that.

The Hotel Moderne was not excessive in its modernity but at least it could satisfy my craving to be master in my own bathroom; its staff was the youngest, most easily reduced to giggling or panic you can imagine, and its garage mechanic was an old lady in a black bonnet. Does she put on blue overalls when there is work afoot? Happily there was no work afoot. I had some tea, put on a collar and tie, and so adjusted to urban conditions, went out to see Rennes.

It is hard to explain, though I myself comprehend perfectly, why Rennes should have presented itself as a compendium of human contentment that evening, or why it was there and then that I conceded final complete recognition to the value of the Boswell in my composition. It came upon me with overwhelming force that to live most of the hours of the waking life Boswell fashion is the only sane and pleasant way of living. All sorts of problems and perplexities floating in my mind or lurking unformulated in the deeps beneath my mind, seemed to come together in that solution. 'One must be amused, one must be detached, one must be at peace within.'

I said it over several times. I even thought of making a new Lord's prayer about it. Give us this day our daily bread and anything else you like but make us Boswell about it; morning, noon and night, keep us extroverts and let us not think of the dark questions on the inside of things. . . .

## A PROPOS OF DOLORES

### § 2

Rennes has the air of being a very completed place. It is unhurried and satisfied with itself. It has the unemphatic calm of an aquatint. Like all the rest of this planet it is rushing through space at so many thousands of miles a minute, and through time and change with an even more terrible velocity. But it does not know it. It was making no more fuss about it than a dog sleeping in the sun. I went to the Place de la République to send a telegram assuring Dolores that I was not a burnt-out collision by the roadside; it is her invariable imagination when I go out of her sight in a car; 'tendresse' I put in as is our custom; and then I took a turn round the town. It is mainly an eighteenth-century town I should think, with some pleasing islands of old houses that may date from a century or so earlier; there are plenty of bright little shops offering nice things to eat and drink; and all the boot shops and clothing shops seem to have got together in a struggling principal street with a new alias every time it takes a turn, a street that is not so much busy as narrow enough to make a traffic jam out of two old ladies and a donkey cart. There are quite a large number of stately, grey-white buildings with gateways and fine lamps, which may be convents or museums or art galleries or faculties and schools for this or that. There is probably a university. I saw no undergraduates, perhaps they were on vacation, but I understand

## HAPPY INTERLUDE

that here learned men dig continually into the mysteries of Celtic, producing mounds of excavated futilities to replace the Arthurian legends of the more poetic past. If there are no undergraduates there are plenty of cherubic young soldiers in horizon blue who look infinitely distant from any modern warfare, as indeed I hope with all my heart they always will be. There is nothing more alien to modern warfare than a garrison town in France.

The cathedral is none of your Gothic petrifications of mystery and aspiration streaming up to heaven. It lives entirely in the town and is unaffectedly homely; God alone, to whose glory it was erected, knows what conceptions of style were in the hearts of its builders. Near by it I came upon two old ladies who pleased me greatly. The fauna of Rennes is particularly rich in this form of feminity and, could I draw, I would gladly spend a few weeks collecting, classifying and preparing an album, *Harem siccus*, of the various types. An old woman is evidently the last thing Rennes eliminates.

These two were both in black with hats long since subdued to their personalities. One was authoritative, she wore spectacles and spoke down her nose, she leant her head sideways with a critical poise, holding her hands behind her back and keeping her feet apart. The other was short, fat and submissive with a rotund stomach and folded hands and feet. What she had to say, she said like a born Catholic's prayer, low and very very quick, snatching her breath at rare intervals. They were so like two ecclesiastics that for some moments I

### A PROPOS OF DOLORES

doubted my own powers of observation. I walked round them unobtrusively. But I am sure they were old ladies and, I realized more and more clearly, the housekeepers of church dignitaries who had acquired a style from their employers. The short one was certainly feminine; she had a basket and a key on one arm. She bubbled up remarks, used 'Madame' continually, and the other one scrutinized her and jotted occasional replies. I left them reluctantly, for I felt that if my attention was remarked it might be misunderstood – you never know what the French will impute to a travelling Englishman – and I continued my exploration of the town.

There was a spacious, bright Jardin des Plantes with nice unhurried-looking people sitting about, more old ladies in lovely white caps, and children playing and being reproved, and various of those rotund groups of sculptures just for the sake of sculpture, all breasts and thighs and bottoms and sprawl, with which France abounds. There was a Renaissance Palais de Justice that was once a Parliament House, and outside it were the heroic presentations of four immortals of whom I had never heard before, D'Argentré, La Chalotais, Toullier and Gerbier. I wrote their names down. I wonder what they did for me. They looked as great as any other great men. They had an air of being very comfortably settled in life and they all had double chins. And there was an Hotel de Ville adorned with a vast bronze affair of swirling feminine figures that might symbolize almost anything. The waiter in the café of

## HAPPY INTERLUDE

the theatre opposite told me that so far it has symbolized the union of Brittany and France through some dynastic marriage, the union with which this present millennium began.

Millennial is surely the best word for the atmosphere of Rennes. The stirring tide of history ebbed with the revolutionary wars and ended with a few executions. Nothing has happened since. It is far out of the world. It is three hundred and forty-six kilometres from Paris; three hundred and forty-six kilometres from everywhere. It is on the road to Finisterre, which is as much as to say nowhere at all. Sons have radiated away to the sea and colonies and wars, after the manner of sons among peoples that still increase and multiply, many have been killed and few have returned, but that has not torn out the heart of Rennes. If it were not for those boys in horizon blue there would be a shortage of men here and it would disarrange nothing. The place is sleeping with an effect of quiet satisfaction, like a humming top that has done with its whipping and does not yet begin to wabble.

These millennial interludes make the less accentuated spaces of history, and life is very kindly in them. Human beings take heart and begin to be humorous and tolerant and gently entertaining. Tragedy becomes queer and unaccountable. Old ladies sit as custodians in the museums and do not believe in history a bit. Old ladies gossip in the sunlight and drop their voices so that the children shall not hear too

### A PROPOS OF DOLORES

soon of the only things that matter. People do not worry at large. It must have been like this in the less industrialized parts of England during the interminable years of Queen Victoria.

It was the Boer War that gave our British contentment the first plain intimations of a wobble. In 1914 the wobbles became violent, and now, now the whole universe is reeling about us. Even for the British, the impassive Tory British, the universe is reeling. They know it though they hate to admit it by word or act. But Rennes, I see, has still to notice it. Rennes is genuine pre-war still. My years in the trenches seem like a dream here.

As the shadows lengthened in these healing grey streets my mind turned to the thought of dinner. I drifted to the *café* over against the Hotel de Ville.

The Hotel de Ville is concave like the London County Hall; the theatre has a bulge to correspond; the *café* is in the bulge; in my happy mood this minor agreement also gave me pleasure. The Place de la Mairie is the space between, and it would certainly be obliterated entirely and exactly if by any convulsion of nature the two buildings came together. Trivial little trams have their rendezvous in this space and I watched a diversity of pleasant people carrying bags, baskets, portfolios, sticks, umbrellas, their own hats, and other objects, choose gravely between this tram and that, though it did not seem to me to be of the slightest importance which tram anyone took.

A very young soldier had found this place, which

## HAPPY INTERLUDE

abounds in cobbles and stray pebbles and is occasionally traversed by meteoric motor cars, suitable for the instruction of a stout young lady in the art of riding a bicycle; and two or three dogs, a newspaper vendor and a municipal but futile street-cleaner went about their various affairs. Outside the café two waiters in white aprons became active spreading out chairs and tables and erecting barriers for one of those open-air cinema shows without which no summer evening in a French provincial town is complete.

Forgetting those three hundred and forty-six kilometres between Rennes and Paris I ordered a dry martini cocktail and was properly rewarded with a small tumblerful of warmish mixture in which Cinzano and ginger were the most evident ingredients.

(Yet after all why should not one have ginger in cocktails and warm them up a bit?)

I was so pleased with this cocktail which I sat and admired rather than consumed, abandoning it in the end as if inadvertently, that I dined in the restaurant within. There was a delightful waiter who lit a red-shaded table lamp in full daylight because it was more *gai* for M'sieu, but beyond that were no surprises. I forgot about the dinner; I am sure it was quite a good dinner and that being in Brittany, there was lobster in it somewhere. I returned to the open air and the now imminent cinema show for coffee.

When the film began and revealed itself as a flickering patched-up old American film about vamps, virtuous toughs, crime and that detestable rich young

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man of New York with a resolute jowl and a heart of gold, I went away quietly and found another *café* on the Vilaine where three men and two women were playing excellent music, and there I pretended to consume an ardent cognac which secretly, after the perfect example of Sir Philip Sidney, I gave to a box of privet whose need for it certainly looked greater than mine. I watched little men come in importantly and greet the waiters magisterially, and men with their womenfolk chosing with infinite care and wariness tables that were exactly like all the other tables, and young men posing Byronically, and a very stylish desperate young man with a large dog, and three peasants with a secret business in hand and their heads all close together, and a whore or so, not unaware of the lonely man in the corner and quite unaware of my loyalty and devotion to Dolores.

For Dolores, about whom I shall presently begin telling you, is enough woman for any reasonable man.

One of these girls was not at all ill-looking. How localized types still remain in our world in spite of all our transport! She might have sat as model for the bronze Brittany outside the Hôtel de Ville. Maybe some great-great-grandmother did. Rennes seemed to look at me with inquiry and invitation through her eyes. But my adamantine virtue was proof against the friendliness in her face. I affected to lose all interest in her. I withdrew into my own thoughts.

## HAPPY INTERLUDE

### § 3

All the while beneath the receipt and appreciation of these superficial events I was going on with a train of ideas that had arisen almost imperceptibly during the day and which was becoming more and more interesting to me, about happiness, about why I was happy, why so often I am not happy, why I am often angry and ungracious, why many people I care for and particularly just now Dolores whom by all reckoning I love, are frequently and abundantly unhappy, why I in particular hurt and wound people and indeed a whole anatomy of gladness and melancholy, gathering itself together with a sort of lazy activity out of the miscellaneous activities of my mind.

This train of thought which began to assemble in Rennes has been picking up passengers ever since. It has been picking up luggage and material, and indeed to keep on the metaphor, has been adding trucks and vans and wagon-lit cars to itself for some days, shunting into sidings, encountering breakdowns and collisions, making sudden runs into new country and generally proving so entertaining that I am setting myself to write some of it down before it runs abruptly into some terminus and gets itself broken up and dispersed as all my trains of thought are apt to do. And since it is about my journey in this train, wherever it takes me, that I am going to write and not of my tour in Brittany,

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I will not describe my second happy day with even so much particularity as I have given the first.

All the morning I spent in a search for some tranquil, simple but extremely comfortable place where Dolores may rest her weary nerves and body and her tormented soul. I came through Mûr-de-Bretagne and by Bon-Repos, Rostrenen and Carhaix to Torquéstol, and except that coming out of Rennes in the briskness of the morning I raced, sinfully and triumphantly, two very very young, very very hatless, very open-necked young men in a vast blue car – because they came up yonking impertinently behind me along the road to St. Brieuc, with every advantage on their side, colour, beauty, youth, everything indeed except good brakes and horse power – racing them until I was dust in their distant prospect and had lost and forgotten them altogether, I devoted myself entirely to seeking out and interviewing the proprietors and directors of pensions, hotels and lodgings with a view to Dolores' comfort, peace and satisfaction. All turned their best sides to me at once, while they calculated rapidly what might be the maximum prices a mad Englishman with an invalid wife, her maid, a pet dog, a car and a chauffeur, and a limitless appetite for bathrooms, would pay for a merely apparent approximation to his fantastic requirements and what would be the minimum to frighten him off, and I was able to observe them and their accommodation without distraction while they were thus preoccupied.

Three or four charming places I found, quite full

## HAPPY INTERLUDE

up but loth to refuse so tempting a feast of profit as I promised to be. They clung to me and it seemed easiest to let them cling for a bit. They lied to me, they pretended to me, they wheedled me, they charmed me and I did nothing to prevent them. I was particularly astonished by a deeply religious pension, I forget exactly where, with a sort of shrine to the Virgin upon a bracket in every room and, as the proprietress insisted – though I don't know why she should have repeated it four times – a water-closet on each half-landing. Perhaps because there were four half-landings and she was short of breath and found it nice to pause and open a door and have something to display. If it had been a skyscraper I should certainly have had a glut of water-closets, more than I could have ever used except upon a most exacting system. It was a family pension, the signs and sounds of children were abundant; evidently they were children accustomed to live frankly, controversially and at the tops of their voices, with their elders. The board outside proclaimed tennis and a parc. The 'tennis' – it was the first of an extremely interesting series I have viewed in Britanny – was an expanse of unrolled gravel amidst which children digging for treasure had left a pail and a spade, and as for the parc – ! Where, I asked, was the parc?

The arm of the proprietress went from the tennis by way of the hens about our feet to the washing under the trees. Beyond the washing a docile young priest sat on an iron seat controlling his thoughts with a little

#### A PROPOS OF DOLORES

book amidst a confused playing, screaming and hullabaloo of the offspring of less celibate pensionnaires. That was the 'parc'.

And in the matter of baths? Whenever M'sieu wished he could have a bath. Where? Wherever he wished. Brave little proprietress! How rarely in any country can one have baths for the wishing!

At Torquéstol at last I found clean and seemly rooms vacant, giving on a pleasant view, and a credible visible bathroom with a definite position where one might count on finding it again and which could be monopolized for our use; it had taps and I tried them and they ran and the hot one was hot. I chose with very great care the very quietest rooms for Dolores and other less meticulously for myself, Bayard and the rest of our household, arranged for the detached proximity of Auguste and the housing of the large impressive blue car of Dolores beside my smaller but speedier own, and my mission thus accomplished I lunched and then I spent my afternoon finding my way through a maze of minor roads, erratic deaf cows and helpful-spirited but incomprehensible peasants to Portumere, where I had occasion to talk to my friend Foxfield who is writing a book for my firm upon the biology of insects.

It was a difficult but not impossible cross-country journey. I won the toss at most of the turnings but I got into one nasty lane between wet ditches, from which I had to back for the worst half of a kilometre. It left me cheerful. My cheerfulness remained even

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after it had occurred to me that I wanted tea – though commonly the tea craving makes a devil of me. I arrived practically unruffled in spite of the fact that I had had a puncture near Belle-Isle-en-Terre and had changed my wheel so smartly and rapidly and with so bright a consciousness of my briskness that I had left the nice little rubber mat I took out of my car to kneel upon, abandoned on the highway.

## CHAPTER II

### WHETHER LIFE IS HAPPY

(*Torquéstol, August 6th, 1934*)

#### § 1

I FEEL there is going to be a change of key in what I am writing. Do what I can, I am not the extrovert I was during those first blessed days of release from Paris and my personal bothers. And the style will follow the mood. That Boswellian appreciativeness is no common phase with me; I cannot, as the movie directors say, 'hold it', gladly as I would; and here I am, hour by hour and line by line, subsiding towards my more habitual level, a line at which I think and plan, and am only intermittently attentive to the irrelevant things about me.

It is no good pretending to be amused when one is preoccupied. The reader, if he or she is the sort of reader I like, would see through that at once; you must take me as you find me.

My thoughts are no longer untrammelled. During the five days I spent with Foxfield at Portumere this gallant proposition of mine that life is on the whole happy was put through a very severe critical examination. Second thoughts may be best but they are rarely

## WHETHER LIFE IS HAPPY

gayest. The idea had presented itself to me at Rennes with an air of such illuminating discovery that I demanded no credentials. I was pervaded by surprise that I had never observed it before. Hitherto it had been screened, I supposed, by an assumption that happiness was a rare light on a process largely dull or distressful.

Why had I allowed that assumption to stand in my way for so long? It was not, I felt, in the least true. In what manner had it got itself established in my mind? Happiness is the manifest rule of life. And so on, and so on — right ahead with it.

But Foxfield speedily destroyed that first, that almost blinding, vividness of realization, and brought my discovery down to the level of a merely alleged discovery. He debated it as a still open question.

Scenery and talk intermingle in my memory. I like this Brittany. It is new country to me and newer to me than I expected any region could ever be again. No other scenery in the rest of my known world has the same firm yet gentle and clear and entirely distinctive green and grey lucidity. There is no crowding and no confusion. Finisterre is the appropriate name for it. There is definition and finality. Here things have come to a sort of conclusion. The world may go on elsewhere, endlessly, but not here. Here enduring granite meets the incessant sea and there is nothing more to be done about it.

Everything is here that tastes most human, from faith to fairyland; the gentle, solemn men have long

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silly ribbons hanging from their big black hats and the women wear costumes like our Elizabethan ancestresses; they know these are the right things to wear and so they go on wearing them inflexibly. Their faith is a marvellous thing. They not only believe in the Roman Catholic Church and its priests, lock, stock and barrel, but also in all their pre-Christian gods and goddesses, dressed up as saints, wizards, warlocks and fairy folk according to their temperamental quality. They believe in superstitions more than anyone can tell, they believe in charms and they believe in patent medicines and that the way they live will endure for ever.

My memories of Portumere are of countless rocky headlands and islands stretching out one beyond the other to the horizon, of blue channels, bays, pools and races of water, viewed nakedly, or viewed between the stems of intense green trees and as a background to grey-white houses and intricate carven church spires, of excursions to special points of vantage to see this wonderful Breton coast higher and farther, and of walks over weedy tidal rocks encrusted with limpets, barnacles and an abundance of such passive creatures, of fine sands with the shrimps flying almost invisibly and of menacing little crabs scuttling aside from my feet, and all the time that now questioned assertion of the prevalence of happiness imposed itself upon these immediate things and Foxfield dominated the discussion and the scene.

We strolled and we motored, but not very far. The

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strolling stays most in my mind because then it was the better part of the talking was done. We made excursions in my automobile along incredibly narrow lanes and picnicked. We visited a Pardon, which is a sort of annual Major Sabbath, a gathering rather than a festival. And we played tennis not to exhibit or perfect our skill but as the humble instruments of Providence.

There were three tennis courts in Portumere and we experienced them all. They are earth courts, of good red earth. Adamitic. One was marked out by deep furrows and as one player complained, there was 'trop de salade'; another was divided up by wooden strips, once level but now by reason of the wearing down of the surrounding earth, rising some inches above the general surface and so adding an element of danger to the general uncertainty; and the third, more level, had no perceptible lines marked out at all. The latter two courts were enclosed in netting like hen-runs through which large hens had burst at innumerable points, but the former was set in a receptive shrubbery. Tennis under such circumstances must either be generous and genial or delirious, suspicious and very bitter. We made it a function rather than a game and threw sidelights upon our discussion to one another while we hunted for five of the most rusé tennis balls I have ever known. They were tinted brick red and green and like so many of the lower animals they changed colour according to their surroundings.

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Foxfield had found and made a circle of friends in this place, French, American and English scattered among hired houses and pensions, and he was, I began to fear, dissipating in talk very much that he ought to have been writing down for my firm. A distinguished figure in the literature of France lives here; his description of a date palm at sunset is said to be one of the finest pieces of French prose ever written; he and his family were away and as a publisher who never forgets his mission I was sorry to miss them in general and him in particular, but there was a pleasant little pavilion amidst trees in the great man's garden which he had given Foxfield permission to use. Thither Foxfield, when he was not swimming, going for excursions, playing tennis, eating, sleeping or talking, would, I understood, resort and write my book. On the one occasion when I visited it the chief evidences of activity were two pipes in process of cleaning with feather and straws, the debris of a desperate struggle with a fountain pen and a number of the less known romances of Alexandre Dumas.

Foxfield is one of my discoveries. It is up to me to justify him to my partners. They are a good set, but I hate to think there are criticisms they have to keep at the backs of their minds. Young Clews, I know, feels I have ideals and that he thinks is bad for a publishing business. He thinks I want the business to spread too wide and go too fast. He has never been reconciled to my living in France. I hate to bother Foxfield but still he must realize that I must make good with him. He

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is a big red talkative mouth with a vast fuzz of brindled black and grey hair, he looks at you through his spectacles like the lamps of a big car coming at you fast and rather out of control, and his voice is a rich continuum; I mean it flows along between words as well as in them, there is a lot of word material, so to speak, not made up into words, a richness, an intercalary hum rather like the drone of the bagpipes; but he knows everything there is to be known about biology, I believe, and he knows it and talks about it with a distinction all his own. I met him one night at the Planetarium Club, I listened enchanted and I was seized with the ambition to bottle a few books from this fountain of information, to our mutual advantage.

As a publisher I take myself seriously, I do my best to disseminate as good as I can get and on the whole my partners — they are junior partners, young Clews, Robinson and now Haggerston — have every reason to be content with the general result, but Foxfield has been giving us all a good deal of anxiety. He is behind time with his copy. He begins writing with vigour but he seems to run down if he is not looked after, and he has to be wound up again by my reproachful pursuit. This book of his is to be a plain treatment of life and evolution and what signs of a purpose may be in it all and, like Capek's play, only insects are to be in the cast. He is going to call it *Thursday's Lesson*, after the Fifth Day of Creation.

Personally I hate insects. Nothing has ever frightened me so much in my life as a praying mantis

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that once sat up at me and hissed. I wish God had taken Thursday off for rest and refreshment and gone on perhaps after Sunday to make up for it, but as it is here they are and I suppose we have to kill as many as we can and make the best of the others. We get cochineal from them anyhow, honey, silk, valuable moral lessons and now an increasing amount of biological information. Foxfield says that without the fruit fly there would be no science of genetics worth talking about and that there is no general problem in his science that cannot be discussed most conveniently from etymological instances. And so I have merely stipulated that when the book is done he would not insist upon anything too repulsively creepy and crawly appearing on the outside wrapper.

I had meant to talk to him mainly about business, I had meant to set him an edifying example of relevancy, of resistance to discursive tendencies, of sound practical common sense and all the qualities in which we differ most conspicuously, but my new-found idea that pessimism is an error and a morbid habit of mind, and that life is generally happy, interested him so much and interested me so much and kept us both so preoccupied that now I am back here at Torquéstol I cannot remember whether I ever discussed the question of deferring publication of *Thursday's Lesson* at all, and I suppose I shall have to write to him about it presently. As soon that is as I have written this. But he thrust a very nasty wedge of doubt into my conviction, a wedge I am still unable to extract

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completely. As soon as I get that wedge out I shall go thoroughly into the whole question of the book. What made his objections more effective was that he really seemed to want to be in agreement with me.

A large part of the world of life, lectured Foxfield, can be left out of this question altogether. The bees and the butterflies are neither here nor there in it. They know nothing of happiness. They rejoice as much as and no more than the bubbles in a fountain. All life above the level of such merely chemical things as bacteria, he admitted, seems to be run upon a pleasure-pain system, to be attracted, that is, by this and repelled by that, but the response of a rootlet or an amoeba is so prompt and complete that the sensation must be discharged as soon as it has had time to exist. Before it has had time to 'register'. Let alone that there are no apparent means by which it can register. There can be hardly more hope or fear in a rootlet as it pushes its way through the soil and turns aside from an obdurate rock, than there is in the thread of water that pours windingly into a rock pool as the tide comes in. Yet each can have a very eager, searching air about its movements, which our imagination, mind you, imposes upon it. 'Mind you,' says Foxfield, pinning you down. It is his stock phrase. He sticks out his chin when he says it. In his manuscript it appears so often that it has become a sort of hieroglyphic, a flash of the pen. Which I blue-pencil automatically and instruct the printer's reader to glean after me.

Foxfield doubts if the fierce little crabs who retire

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sideways, threatening me with their claws upheld, until they can sink out of sight in the sand, have much more retentiveness than a rootlet. They give no signs of, they have no use for memory; they must live in mere flashes of fear, anger and appetite, in a myriad of disconnected moments. The fear of your footfall and shadow dies out and is forgotten. A new picture of life dawns in the little crustacean brain ganglion as the former fades away. Conscious life in them is an incoherent sand of disconnected elations and alarms. They never suffer from their pains, never enjoy their pleasures. At their brightest they are walking in their sleep. Pity is as much wasted on a crab or lobster as on a fluttering leaf. Seven-eighths of the animal world is permanently anaesthetized, declared Foxfield. ‘Except that it doesn’t need to be anaesthetized, mind you. Memory need not be paralysed – for that is all an anaesthetic does – because memory has not yet been born.’

It is only, he declares, when we see creatures manifestly receiving impressions and not discharging the stimulus in outward action, but evoking memories, reviving something learnt, hesitating and forming decisions, that we are justified in imagining agreeable and disagreeable states of mind sufficiently coherent and sustained to come within our range of sympathy. Here at last a primitive happiness and unhappiness is dawning. Foxfield doubts, he says, if any creature, not vertebrated, has that much conscious life.

But an octopus remembers, the man at the Nice

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aquarium told me. Foxfield wants to talk to that man. Ants, he admits grudgingly, may have moments of fussy solicitude. He doubts even if any fish has much more conscious life than my liver has or at most than my brain has when, in deep sleep, unwatched and unsuspected dreams chase one another through its cells from nothingness to forgetfulness. Reptiles again do not seem to play; they have the vacuous seriousness of machines. It is only within the warm realms of fur and feather that we find any certain manifestation of the capacity to be happy. Birds, cats and dogs, calves and mice sit and seem to think, lark about, are interested, delighted, dismayed or depressed. Anatomically we find they have organs for the retention of nervous impressions without any immediate outward response just as we have. It is that retention which brings in the preference or the repulsion, the happiness or the unhappiness. They look, they listen, they wind you, and the only immediate return in outward action is that they sniff for further information. The new impressions pile up inside, reverberate among the established reflexes, agreeably or disagreeably. They take something in and it works there. Here certainly must be continuities kindred to, if not as sustained as, the continuities in our own minds.

I conceded Foxfield his butterflies and retreated to the gambolling lamb and the tail-chasing kitten, but Foxfield went on taking the joy out of the universe. Still, if he was taking out joy he was also taking out suffering to correspond. He was narrowing the field of

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happiness but he was not tilting any balance against it. He was also narrowing the field of misery.

How far, he inquired, is the happiness of these nearer creatures conscious of itself? Do these beasts know they are unhappy or happy? Our own states of mind are often inconsecutive and disconnected but they do generally refer to a self, conscious of its states. Happiness looks backwards and forward and centres on an idea of self. Its richness depends on the associations it involves. Has a cat an idea of itself? A dog has but Foxfield was not so sure of a cat. Dogs seem capable of self-reproach, but had I ever detected any introspective quality in a cat? Does a cat ever tell itself: 'I am treated unjustly. My life is an unhappy one?'

When a cat basks in the sun does it say: 'This is good'?

'You don't know some of the cats I have known,' I told Foxfield. 'Nothing on earth will persuade me that that black cat I have in Paris is not as capable of self-congratulation as any man. Have you never watched a cat sitting up on the mat and blinking at a fire?'

Dolores, by the by, hates my cat. It is a large clean black cat with perfect manners; it is a tom-cat whose morals have been put beyond suspicion. It likes to sit near me and it will never sit near her. On some private occasion it has explained its view of life to her pet Bayard, and the little beast never goes near it except by its grace and condescension. Sometimes

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when I am too long in London Dolores threatens to have it poisoned. If Dolores addresses it directly or if her voice rises and she seems set for talking, it drops *plump* to the ground and goes quickly but softly to the door and waits to be let out.

'You may have your cats,' said Foxfield, reflecting upon it impartially, with his spectacles consulting the horizon. 'You are probably right about cats.'

### § 2

The other day, just before I started upon this trip, I spent half an hour in silent and sympathetic proximity to a big rusty-red orang-outang in the Jardin d'Acclimatation. He is that sort of orang-outang which has a flat expansion of the cheeks on either side so that its face, so far as its lower parts are concerned, looks like a mask. It seems to wear those huge jaws and lips like something that has been imposed upon it, and over them very intelligent light-brown eyes look out with an expression of patient resignation upon the world. So it has pleased God. Sometimes those quiet eyes would scrutinize me, mildly speculative, sometimes they watched other spectators or brooded upon the baboons in an adjacent cage, whose sins were as scarlet.

My sage moved rarely, to scratch his chest or his arm thoughtfully and once to yawn. But even in captivity and already perhaps mortally sick, for these

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great apes acquire tuberculosis and suchlike human infections with a terrible readiness, he gave no sign of unhappiness. Those little hazel eyes were wise and tranquil. Captive and ill, he had every reason to be unhappy, but I do not think he was unhappy. If I could have changed consciousnesses with him and got into that cokernut head of his, I think I should have perceived a small weak childish interest in spectators, in baboons – like a child looking out of a window – little imaginations set going by these sights and nothing else. I doubt if he was worried and distressed in the least by his captivity. Quite possibly, but not certainly, he would have been happier in his native forest, but he did not know that. He had forgotten his native forest, or remembered it and the parental nest only in dreams. There may have been terror in these dreams and it may have been reassuring to wake in the large secure cage again. I think he was still to be counted as a mild fragment of at least contentment.

Before I last crossed to Paris from London I saw a film called *Simba*, done by that courageous, enterprising and interesting couple Mr. and Mrs. Hope Johnson; it gave the most intimate views of wild animals grazing, prowling, drinking. The sight of a whole herd of giraffes galloping round in slow motion was something I shall not easily forget. The up and down of the balancing heads was delightful. But that's by the way. My impression of the bearing of these lions, wildebeestes, giraffes, elephants and antelopes, snapped unawares, was one, not indeed of

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vivid delight, but of a satisfied contentment, and that is my impression also of the domestic animals I see about me. It has been suggested that the lives of wild things are 'fear-haunted'. Fear, I admit, is always ready to jump out upon wild life, but that it 'haunts' them is just what *Simba* helps me to deny. You want a more elaborate brain before such haunting can begin. And as Foxfield insists, animals will not endure unhappiness any more than they will endure pain. They begin to do something about it. It may be something very rash and destructive, but it shunts energy from suffering to action. Even if they kill themselves the pain is at an end.

He was not very reassuring, however, about the amount of pleasure relative to pain and of disagreeable states relative to agreeable states, among animals. An animal, he holds, even if it has not the intelligence to be continuously unhappy, may be discontinuously unhappy over a large part of its life and still live. There was nothing in his biological science to assure us that that is impossible. Foxfield squatting in judgment on a rocky slab at Portumere, slowly drying his hairy chest and shoulders with a towel and occasionally stopping altogether to think, would for no consideration endorse that extreme preponderance of happiness I had seen, as in a vision, at Rennes. He thought that by the nature of things and taking a long stretch of time, happiness may 'preponderate considerably' over unhappiness, but not necessarily at any one time nor in the case of every species.

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Most species in existence must be 'reasonably well adapted' to their conditions or they would not be in existence. In a species reasonably well adapted to its conditions the average individual must be fairly well off by the standards of its nature. The inferior individuals will be going under in the struggle for existence and having a bad time; that one cannot help, that is Nature's universal way; but theirs will be the shortest lives, soonest over. They won't drag on. And the best adjusted will live longest and put in larger lumps of appreciative living. 'Life refuses to carry pain,' said Foxfield. 'It couldn't live on, if it didn't.' Pain is Nature's invitation to rebel. It is Nature's way of making the beast realize, 'This won't do.' The beast rebels, refuses, and it becomes a case of kill or cure. 'And when it comes to human unhappiness,' said Foxfield, emerging from the shirt he was putting on and staring at me with the inexpressive face of science: 'I suppose the same thing holds.'

He seized his trousers and put them on, so lost in thought that it was only when he found some novel difficulty in adjusting his braces, that he realized he had drawn them on rear foremost. 'Blast,' he said, and set himself to put matters right. When this trouble occurred I was going to ask whether it might not be possible for a human being to find a sort of happiness in the elaboration of unhappiness. Certain perplexing things about Dolores were in my mind, but the fascination of watching Foxfield think out his trouser trouble, including an interesting phase when

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he had both legs in one trouser, drove my point completely out of my mind at the time. When at length he was properly trousered and he could sit on his rock again, he pushed his hair away from the earnest outlook of his spectacles and resumed our former discourse. 'Mind you,' he said, 'I disagree with Paley from the outset.'

'Paley?'

Paley, he reminded me, opened his *Evidences* by declaring that the world is manifestly made for the happiness of the creatures living therein. So Paley was of my opinion.

'There,' said Foxfield, 'you have the considered opinion of a cultivated intelligence in the later eighteenth century. That to him was *obvious*, something no one would wish to dispute.'

Was it generally true that creatures well adapted to survive lived lives that were mainly pleasant? Foxfield, sitting like a biological judge, ruled that it was. Of course the life of many quite well adapted species was a life of massacre, but that did not mean that it was unpleasant. Consider the frog. Thousands of tadpoles were killed for every one that dropped its tail and got out of the water, and the little frogs suffered a similar slaughter before the few survivors grew up, but they lived cheerfully enough until the blow fell. It was just their careless gaiety got them killed. Being killed, he said, wasn't unhappiness unless you thought about it beforehand. Did any creature do that but man?

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What are the chief factors of unhappiness? Present pain, fear, grief, but that passes, disappointment and frustration. 'Frustration,' Foxfield repeated, 'Frustration', as one might fumble at a clue.

'Is anything more unhappy than a chained dog?' he asked.

'Or a caged bird?' I contributed.

'Worse than vivisection. People overrate the agonies of vivisection and underrate cages and chains and the dismal lives of pets dragging through their days with every instinct suppressed. . . .'

Bayard panting under the sympathy of Dolores but knowing no better life and so quite unconscious of the reason for his yapping viciousness, occurred to me.

### § 3

Foxfield pursued his argument. In a species generally adapted to its environment, living under the same conditions as hundreds of thousands of previous generations, it was only reasonable to assume that the normal life was pleasant. And taking life all over, most species seem to have lived mainly in phases of balance or with conditions changing so slowly that they could vary to meet the new requirements. That gave a considerable preponderance of happiness in the past history of conscious life.

But that ceased to be the case if for a time conditions changed too fast. Then the species became a misfit.

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Only exceptional individuals would get along easily; the percentage of failures and of more or less frustrated individuals would rise. There was reason to suppose that a species undergoing extinction or undergoing violent modification was in many cases living very unpleasantly indeed. Not always. You could imagine extinction without unhappiness as well as extinction with much pain and misery. Supposing the frog's surroundings remained the same as they are now except that some extraordinarily skilful and voracious frog-eating animal appeared. All the frogs might ultimately be consumed, but until that time arrived the individual frog, blind to the massacre of his fellows and lacking all statistical sense or racial solicitude, would hop about very cheerfully. But suppose the adverse change in conditions was not a new frog eater but a change of frog-food supply – from easily digestible to unsuitable food! That would make every individual uncomfortable. A whole species then might be in distress and pass distressfully towards extinction.

'Elephants,' Foxfield remarked in parenthesis, 'suffer greatly from wind. They go about the African forests making borborygmic noises. Travellers remark upon the overwhelming smell a herd of elephants leaves behind it. It seems improbable that this was the original state of affairs. Something has changed about their food – even in the forest.'

There may have been epochs in the world's history, epochs of exceptional geographical and climatic change, when most existing forms of life would be

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living discordantly and disagreeably, the whole creation groaning and travailing, living in unsuitable climates, walking on uncongenial soils, eating indigestible foods.

'And when we come to man,' said Foxfield and paused.

'No other animal seems to be aware of death. Of all creatures man alone knows that he must die. From the individual point of view every human life ends in frustration and this fact casts its shadow before it.'

I objected that few people thought about that. They managed not to do so. They thought of other things. And most of those who find the idea troublesome, resort to the belief in an immortal soul . . . Not all, though.

'Man' – Foxfield weighed the consideration – 'certainly has great powers of suppressing disagreeable facts and thoughts. He contrives not to think about unpleasant or unflattering things. But what happens at the back of his mind? Isn't there an uneasiness? Aren't most human beings now, au fond, uneasy?"

Give him time – and he does not need nearly so much time as an animal because his adjustments are mental and not organic – give him time and man will reconcile himself to the most astonishing changes in his conditions. Nevertheless, some time is needed, and at present the conditions of human life are changing so rapidly as to outpace his utmost adaptability. His knowledge and power increase faster than the wisdom of his conduct. In his past as the fact of the coming of death dawned upon his increasing intelligence, he

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could evoke the dream of immortality. Every concession and humiliation that he had to accept as his social organization developed, for the history of human societies is a history of suppressions, produced its consolations and mental compensations. The civilization which culminated in Europe in the seventeenth century developed slowly enough for minds to be attuned to it. It was homely, it was limited by our standards, but it had wide stretches of contentment. There was much incidental crime and cruelty no doubt in that departing world, purple patches and streaks of livid colour, but they were in proportion. They interrupted but they did not upset the rhythm of that civilized life. It flowered, and its flowering was its undoing, it engendered châteaux and country houses where leisure begot curiosity and science, it tolerated and fostered the kingly sport of war, and so it prepared its own dissolution.

I described to Foxfield how I had found the seventeenth century still holding out in Rennes and what a pleasant life it had seemed to me.

Foxfield declared that human life at large, from China to San Francisco, was still being carried on by what I had just called seventeenth-century traditions. Most of our race cling still to homely comfort, live their lives within concepts of national loyalty and decent morality, of industry and mild effort and saving and seemly success, of restrained and private joys, of gentle social intercourse, firm but unobtrusive display and temperate rivalries and mutual criticism, of little

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treats and local interests keenly appreciated. To be continually busy about a mildly varied series of small things is still the common desire of mankind. By not thinking too much of the end of things and taking the priests' assurance about it, death was robbed of its sting. Extreme unction was a great invention—for the troubled survivor. 'Not an unhappy life,' said Foxfield, 'not by any means an unhappy life . . . But it has notice to quit. And the notice, mind you, is getting urgent.'

'Fate offers a greater human life to mankind now, a *vaster* life,' Foxfield went on. 'This is a platitude now. Man can fly, he can travel swiftly to the ends of the earth, see and hear everything that happens about his globe, satisfy all his needs with an ever-diminishing exertion and then, facing a monstrous leisure, find himself superfluous even for his own needs . . . And there you are!'

I 'Hoist by his own petard,' said I mechanically.

By a moment's silence Foxfield featured his distaste for stale phrases even in the mouth of a publisher he has to propitiate, and then he resumed the tenor of his discourse.

Either, he said, man has to adapt himself consciously to the new, the larger and the appallingly strenuous and dangerous way of living he has opened to himself, or as a species he has to suffer some complex biological dégringolade. He may differentiate into conflicting species, into hunter and prey, master parasite and slave host; or he may blunder down

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violently to complete extinction. The one thing he could not do was to stay at where he was and at what he was at the present time.

Foxfield enlarged upon that and I wish I could reproduce his words, the flow of sounds upon which they were conveyed, his earnestness, his spectacles, his abundant black and white streaked hair, now getting into the conversation and now blowing away out of it. He made human destiny look like a madly plunging horse – with an amateur in the saddle, an amateur who began by being too indolent to ride it and then became too scared. And the horse wasn't a horse either. It became a bristling nightmare that not only grew vaster and wilder but threw out spikes and bayonets and spurred its rider murderously through the saddle.

More and more of the old social order, prophesied Foxfield, will dissolve and tumble into a chaos that may or may not give place to a new creation. There were no biological precedents to guide us to a prophecy of the outcome, because man's limited but incessant intelligence makes his case unique.

'But here,' said Foxfield, with the emotional impartiality of the scientific man; 'here surely are all the necessary conditions for an extreme and almost universal unhappiness. Here,' said Foxfield with the manner of one who holds up a small specimen of a rare species, 'here is a world that the mechanisms we have invented insist, we must either unify or smash, and to unify it and adapt ourselves to it means the

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elimination of whole classes of nationally and socially important people. These classes, which ought to be superseded now, will probably refuse either to learn or to vanish. *Probably?* – a high degree of probability. They will show fight. They will feel a certain romantic pride in showing fight. They will hurt and be hurt. And mind you, it isn't only adaptation they will resist, it is also the mass unsettlement of the workers, released to a dangerous leisure as they will be by mechanism, that they will have to fear also – and have every cause to fear. That stares them in the face. It is the outstanding aspect of the situation for them. They may display unexpected tenacity and turn an unknown proportion of our power and machinery to defensive and destructive ends. They are in fact doing that.

'Of course individuals die, generations die and take prejudices and obsessions with them. Death makes for progress. Some of us try to give new ideas to the new generation. You do. But are you getting it over to them? There's not much time, mind you.

'Machines, mind you, are continually diminishing the need for toil and toilers, and most human beings at the present level are fit for nothing else. How can we suddenly make them fit for anything else? What else? Education you say. But education for what? What is to be the new economy, the new functions? Peasant food production was an absolute necessity up to a hundred years ago; now it is totally unnecessary – but the tenacious peasant is a very real

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and present fact. On the one hand, you see we have superfluous classes holding on, on the other, superfluous masses in the industrial regions and impoverished peasants rooted wherever the soil is good, masses and peasants with no purchasing power or with diminishing purchasing power and yet with ever more vividly stimulated appetites and resentments. Man with nothing to do is a wretched man and often a dangerous man. Are we to massacre the unproductive? Even if we support them they will be intolerably wretched. Something, mind you, has to be done.

'Mechanical and scientifical progress has abolished not only the need for gross population, but also that infantile and general mortality that once kept population within practicable limits. Even if population ceases to increase, even if it diminishes, you will still have superfluous people. It is not a question of totals; it is a question of proportion. The fewer the consumers, the less work will there be to do. The need for children is less and will diminish, and that makes an increasing proportion of the women in the world superfluous as mothers, home-makers and – in any honourable sense of the word – women. Frustration and perversion of all their distinctive instincts may presently become the common lot of women. As a matter of fact from the point of view of preserving the species a woman's sexual impulses are a remarkably poor and inadequate bunch of instincts. In the animal stages lust was good enough to set them to work; now women know better. They may tempt and waste

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men, but there are limits set to the temptability of the irritable yet so easily exhausted – so easily exhausted,’ he repeated with a remarkable note of lamentation in his voice – ‘male’. For the common women even more plainly than for common men, there opens the possibility of leisure without scope or resources and lives without any ulterior significance.

‘Our world,’ he reiterated, ‘is haunted by the superfluous dissatisfied woman. She darkens the sky.’

For an instant I wondered whether I had ever talked to him about Dolores, but his next sentence reassured me.

‘*You*,’ said Foxfield, ‘with your innate hopefulness, your sound instinct for what sells a book and your natural desire to do it by books, school books, encyclopaedias and so on, may say that all this *can* be faced, controlled and guided into a new happy life for mankind. A tremendous education that will have to be. Every living person a gentleman or a fine lady – and all of them skilled workers! I am not so sure, Wilbeck. Not sure at all – very doubtful. Very very doubtful. I do not say you are wrong, mind you, but I cannot admit you are right. No science at present can say whether you are right or wrong. There is a superfluity of low-grade activity now in human life, a tremendous gadding about, a superfluity of sexual appetite, a still greater superfluity of the desire for excitement, an accumulation of resentment and restlessness. And *where’s* your new education? The whole creation frets together for it. Adaptation means an

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incalculable amount of unhappiness before even the *way* to that new happy life of yours on a higher level, and as wide as the world, is made plain. If ever it is made plain. You yourself admitted that the pleasant glow in Rennes was a sunset glow. Show me anywhere – anywhere on the entire planet – a dawn.'

Thus Foxfield. . . .

What I ought to have said to him was that one can never say at any particular moment, 'This is the dawn or there is the dawn'. His was an unreasonable demand. One can mark the exact moment of sunrise indeed but then sunrise is a definite event. It is the confirmation of a day already established. Unfortunately I did not think of that at the time. But to me there is a dawn apparent – surely. It has been apparent ever since the Renaissance. It is a big process and I give it a long period. It has the diffused imperceptibly increasing quality of every dawn. People's minds move towards ideas of a 'world order'; more and more of us take the measure of the complex of problems involved. The steadily increasing sales of my *Way of the World* series is good evidence for that. A straw in the wind, but a good omen nevertheless.

People *want* the knowledge they ought to have. . . .

That new world order will not turn out to be the dreadful disappointment the aesthetic highbrows anticipate. The prestige of old institutions melts away; things which to-day still seem full of traditional sawdust may crumple and fall to-morrow. The Dark Ages are in many respects still here but they draw to an

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end. The inundation of the western world by the dogmatic Judaeo-Christian mythology was a vast intellectual catastrophe that left man's understanding of life buried deeply under a silt of fear, error and intolerance. This Christian era has been an age of muttered criticisms, some irony and pretty acute misery for finer intelligences. Every generation produced intelligences. Every generation produced intelligences acute enough to see through it. It must have seemed to those exceptional people as though the human mind was to be suppressed henceforth for ever. Nevertheless, there is a magnificent bias for truth in the heart of man. He whispered, he mocked, he blasphemed. Century after century intelligence has been struggling back and bit by bit our vision of life has recovered lucidity.

First cosmogony emerged, the world which Christian ignorance had stamped upon and flattened out was rolled up again and measured and the stars were set back in their places, then as biology developed, that absurd story of Adam and his irascible Creator faded out, the fires of hell sank and the Fall lost its date, and now in the interpretation of history and our standards of conduct we free our minds from its last lingering obsessions with that great misconception of life. Ethical concepts are being reconstructed. Our manners improve. We control and allay our fretfulness. We get new ideas of what our 'selves' are, and realize the hallucinations of egotism.

And in just the measure we liberate ourselves from

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the crude expectations of a more childish past, in the same measure do we anticipate and escape the consequent disappointments. Because things may presently be strange by our current way of thinking there is no reason why they should not be gay in another fashion. When they come about there will be new ways of thinking. We shall be dead and all our values with us. Where I could take issue with Foxfield is in his assertion of the excessive rapidity of change to-day – in relation to the adaptability of man. I admit the rapidity of the change, but I deny the necessary slowness of the adaptations required of us. We are not so inadaptable; he overrates our power to forget.

He underrates how widely a new generation can be educated away from old feelings. Human beings are obstinate but not really conservative. In less than a third of a century, for example, there has been an immense change in sexual morals; why should equivalent changes in political and economic conduct be impossible? There need not be that age of catastrophic unhappiness Foxfield saw fit to evoke – ungratefully, I thought, with that sea-reflected sunshine dancing all over him. It may happen but it need not happen.

After all he isn't infallible; he is capable of putting on a perfectly correct pair of trousers the wrong way round. I think he puts some facts the wrong way round. I believe that by the time change has altogether dissolved the material supports of this ~~pleasa~~ <sup>fairly in</sup> ~~an~~ <sup>an</sup> reasonably wary, moder-

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ately pious, patriotic, sentimental, family life which is still and which has been for hundreds of generations the normal life of civilized mankind, it is possible and probable that a new generation will be quite ready for, and indeed be living brightly in the next phase. Harder for us to imagine than for them to live in. That may well be as happy a generation as ours. Quite possibly very much happier.

Which, by the by, is why I stick to publishing.

One has to do things, since one cannot always be Boswell observant. Also one must live oneself. I could not smile at the pleasant spectacle of provincial Rennes all unawares of the march of events to supersede it, did I not feel I was helping make another frame of active contentment when Rennes and its like are over. I explain and justify myself to myself as a collector and distributor of creative ideas. I have chosen to be the servant of, and a part of, this greater new world that struggles to exist, and not of the old world that is crumbling away. In this my position as the inheritor of the major interest in a publishing business coincides very happily with my line of thought. If ideas can keep pace with material change all will be well. But the ideas will have to travel hard to do that. I'm a postillion in the world of mind and the pace is my business. I can be happy in this world. I like this queer trade of a publisher. The business side I do with an effort, but not unsuccessfully. My partners are good associates, critical but amenable, they believe in me and our staff is a fine one.

## WHETHER LIFE IS HAPPY

As I threaded my way back from Portumere to Torquéstol I turned conclusively against Foxfield's coming Age of Miserable Leisure. Nothing of that sort is going to happen. I admit that through this inevitable phase of universal change ahead there are bound to be no end of misfits, riddles of adjustment, frustrations and the ache of impotent leisure, but all such things may still remain manageable. I grant the probable billions of distressful cases, the hardships of learning and the hardship of failing to learn the new ways, but not the universal tragedy. There are as good worlds in the womb of time as ever came out of it.

At any rate, I remain cheerful – if only through some inner necessity. Cheerfulness will prevail. I believe it in my bones. Our authors, my collection mainly, criticize this present world to rags; it is what they are for, but they jest and whistle at their work because they believe they clear the site for greater things. Of course you know my *Way of the World* series. You must know it. It has developed collaterals and thrown out a sort of twin system in America. There I work hand in hand with Lenormand. For all its faults this book propaganda of ours is doing an educational task that the universities fail to do – and doing it cheerfully. Doubts are wholesome, but if I can help it, we will never issue a blankly pessimistic book to founder souls in trouble.

While there is a chance of the world getting through its troubles I hold that a reasonable man has to behave as though he was sure of it. If at the end

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your cheerfulness is not justified, at any rate you will have been cheerful.

Dolores is all the other way. Years ago I said my luckiest day was the day when I was born. She has never forgotten that. She still quotes it against me at lunches or dinners and suchlike social occasions. Her birth, she holds, was a wrong done to her, a tragedy. Somewhere she has caught up the phrase 'I was sentenced to life'. Yet she sticks to life in gross and in detail with an extraordinary tenacity – just as she sticks to me. That does not hinder her in the least from abusing both of us continually, life I mean and me. Criticizing, she would call it; she will never admit that it is irrational abuse. Her penetration beneath the deceits of life, she insists, is her misfortune. I wish it were not also mine. Her radiating antagonism, she feels, is the proof of her intellectual distinction. She thinks it is original to contradict. She feels to surrender is to agree.

## CHAPTER III

### THE MARRYING OF DOLORES

(*Torquéstol, August 9th, 1934*)

#### § 1

IN spite of various distractions of my attention, I have stuck to the task of putting my talk with Foxfield on record before it began to seep away into the general mass of my thoughts and experiences. My notes may have a lot too much theorizing about life and its possibilities in them for your taste, but after all this is my book and not yours. If you confront me with the alternative I prefer theorizing to pleasing you. You can go to some other book if you do not like this one, or write a book to your own measure.

This may seem insolence but there is really more insolence in pandering and writing down to the reader. For that is to assume that he cannot think out his own ideas for himself and wants you to think them out for him, it is calling him dull, calling him ego-centred. I do not publish these propitiatory authors if I can help it and I certainly do not intend to be one myself. I am writing about Happiness, Happiness at large and Happiness apropos of Dolores here, because I find them profoundly interesting and for no other reason.

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Anyhow I have enough to bother me just now without considering a reader's reactions. With the best will in the world to go on being happy, I am not happy. I am not amused. I am no longer genial. Why should I not admit it? I may be happy again presently — my texture is elastic — but just now I feel that I shall never be happy again. I feel like a bird put back in its cage. Dolores and Marie her maid are installed here with Auguste and the big car, not to mention Bayard the Pekinese; she came by road after all and not by rail because of the bother of coming from the main line station by the branch hither; Bayard has been slightly run down and needed professional attention; and I have had a phase of irritability — for the most part controlled and concealed — that has made my writing quite difficult enough without any literary tricks and graces. Endless small distracting exasperations arose out of the arrival. But I think I have now got the framework of the matter sketched out.

Let me recapitulate a little and find out how far my train of thought has travelled. First station; exhilarated by speed and fresh air I thought I had discovered that happiness was the common background of life. But Foxfield did his earnest best to deflate that discovery. Now at the second station I am left asking myself whether I have discovered anything more than that *a priori*, living things *ought* to be happy — and that on two exceptionally sunny days most of those I encountered seemed to be so.

Perhaps language misleads us here and makes the

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positive thing seem the negative thing and vice versa? If after all I am right, and happiness is the norm, then it is happiness which is the temporary, outstanding and interesting fact that has to be dealt with. At any rate, it was really unhappiness and not happiness that Foxfield and I discussed. We discussed the conditions under which unhappiness appears. It can appear only in the case of a creature with memory and foresight and even with such creatures it appears only in the stresses of imperfect adaptation. Speaking from a scientific standpoint such phases ought to be minor chapters in the experience of life. Change is rarely abrupt and convulsive. When change is gradual one may assume a steady discouragement and elimination of the imperfectly adapted and a steady advantage of the happy. Life is self-adjusting.

Under fairly stable conditions all species of sentient creature should, generation by generation, be getting happier. But nowadays change is no longer gradual and we are in such a state of stress as no life has ever encountered before. Man in the last few score thousand years has been changing his conditions with an increasing violence and throwing not only himself but incidentally most other surviving mammals out of gear. God knows what man *hasn't* thrown out of gear in the past hundred years. Man is a biological catastrophe. Hence now, in this age, in this particular epoch in the history of living creatures, we have a monstrous amount of misfitting. We have a big and increasing proportion of individuals, not only men

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but animals, whose feelings, impulses, instincts and traditions are out of harmony with the realities that close in upon them. Consider the horses. Consider the hunt for wild creatures that is going on everywhere. Consider our clearings and sprayings and ploughings. Consider the frantic terror of a forest fire. Were there ever forest fires before we came? We harry all life.

This diagnosis of the biological situation, as Foxfield and I worked it out, is the modern form of the dogmas of the Fall and Original Sin. It is a scientific statement replacing a myth to explain an almost universally recognized contemporary reality. The whole creation groaneth and travaileth – now.

My talk with Foxfield and my return here have brought my train of thought back towards its own hidden origins. It is possible that beneath the conscious surface of my mind there has been another flow of ideas going on and that my sudden discovery of happiness when I motored to Rennes was only a vivid and conscious reaction to suppressed because unwelcome perplexities. Or, in other words, Dolores has come aboard that train of thought now, the personification of human discontent, the living indictment of my happiness theory; she and her beastly little dog, her woes, her spites and quarrels and all her baggage, and I am no longer an irresponsible passenger. What is engaging my attention more and more and distracting it from all the larger aspects of life is the distressful immediate problem of close association with an

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unhappy, increasingly aggressive fellow creature, and what I am to do about her. She will not let me be happy with her and I do not seem to be able to get away from her. Though I have lengthened our phases of separation I am still with her altogether too much. What am I to do?

And what is the world to do with sad, insatiable, malignant, quarrelsome, grievance-cherishing people? Why must it suffer them?

I am afraid the sparkle has gone out of the wine I broached so cheerfully a week ago and somehow I haven't the power to open another bottle now. At times I can laugh at Dolores but just at present I am altogether too much up against her for laughter.

I saw to it that my room was on a different floor from the bedroom and sitting-room she occupies and so I am able to relieve my feelings by writing a thoroughly frank and unqualified chapter about her without fear of interruption. There is nothing else to be done.

Here goes for the case of *Stephen Wilbeck contra Dolores*.

### § 2

For some years now Dolores has been building up a system of claims upon me and everyone about her, upon the basis that she is *sad*. She poses more and more definitely as an ailing woman acutely disappointed by me and the world. She charges the whole universe with unworthiness. Her mournful eyes

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survey a summer morning and she knows that it is deceiving her. A wayside crucifix could not protest against earthly cheerfulness more resolutely than she does.

There has always been a certain disposition on her part towards the profession of melancholy. And she is habitually prone to disapprove, condemn and if she can, punish. Latterly these tendencies have become more marked. Since she constitutes my essential household and is my necessary chief companion, so far as I have household or companion, I am forced into the position of a judge between her and this world she by habit and some incomprehensible necessity indicts. War, pestilence, famine and Dolores cannot shake my conviction that it might be a much worse world than it is. It may be lurid, grotesquely cruel at times, mean and arid at times, it is in a phase of neurasthenia, it is out of sorts, it needs a *cure* now, yet even now, at moments it can be amazingly gay, kind, lovely and exalting. It is a two-sided world. She will not hear of that. 'You are so easily deceived,' she says. 'You are as credulous and changeable as a child. You can be pleased by anything, you can be generous to anyone — except me.'

That is her general attitude. But she is also a woman of subsidiary attitudes. 'You *would* say that,' she says. 'But if one day *I* praised the world you would make some sneering joke about it.'

And indeed quite possibly I should be astonished to the pitch of hilarious comment.

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Yesterday evening was saddened by an almost criminal negligence on my part. I forget anniversaries. I am not a neolithic agriculturist and I leave the calendar to my secretary far away now in London. Summer and winter, sun and rain, week-ends, the spring and autumn publishing seasons, such loose anniversaries are good enough for me. But Dolores reminds me of cardinal dates, and more particularly of any forthcoming date when a carefully chosen present would be appropriate. This time because of all our coming and going either she failed to give the hint or I overlooked it. So on this 17th of August I walked into her room in my pyjamas to say good-night to her as though it was just any night. Even the subtle scent of jasmin which is Dolores' passionate intimation, did nothing to mark the importance of the day.

I drew back the window curtains to look at the town and church sleeping under the moonlight. 'I love the lines of those roofs,' I said. 'And those slender trees.'

I made one or two other remarks and became aware of a portentous lack of response. Not a word. Not a movement. I turned sharply to find Dolores sitting up in her bed, pale and intent, a dark hank of hair over one resentful eye and her long, lean, silver-bangled arms about her knees.

'Don't come near me,' she said.

'No?'

'Go away from me.'

I came and seated myself on the bed. 'Well?' I asked.

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'This is the seventeenth of August,' she said. I gave myself to you — thirteen years ago. Thirteen years!'

'Darling,' I parried. 'It's so difficult to find anything worthy of you in Torquéstol.'

'You forgot altogether.'

'Moving about,' I pleaded lamely.

'You have eaten up my life.'

'Hardly — *eating*.'

'You have eaten up my life.'

I made no further attempt to quibble.

'In those days I was young, happy, rich, free.'

I was in no position to contradict her. The discussion of her pre-marital position involves many complicated issues.

'Look at me now!'

'Most attractive, my dear, but a little thorny and difficult.'

'A broken woman.'

### § 3

It is thirteen years ago then that Dolores made that supreme sacrifice, almost in despite of me. Thirteen years is a considerable piece to take out of the middle of a lifetime, out of hers as well as out of mine. Yet it comes with a certain effect of surprise to discover that we have left this tap running for thirteen years. Thirteen years. I am in my forty-sixth year and already nearly a decade past the better half of life.

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I was thirty-two then and we met for the first time a week or ten days before. We were both staying at the Hotel Pension Malta between St. Juan and Antibes, I with a small group of friends and she with a Swiss photographer, Fräulein Kettner, rather older than herself. My friends were conscientiously cheering me up after my earlier matrimonial disaster. For I had been divorced already. I had had to give my wife a divorce.

I was understood to have behaved very handsomely to Alice, though as a matter of fact I was never of that opinion. But I saw no reason whatever at the time to fuss about the judgments that were passed on us. No discredit attached to either of us. The truth about our affair was not so much distorted as simplified by the omission of most of the essential facts. She remarried and I went my way — ostensibly a lonely man. There were attempts to console me, not unpleasant attempts, for the nineteen-twenties were easy years, but none of my consolations took a permanent form until Dolores grasped my situation.

I had joined up early in 1915 and served most of my time on the western front, getting nothing more serious than a broken arm in a trench raid in 1916. I did my soldiering fairly well, I was made a sergeant-major and had some difficulty in avoiding a commission. I liked the men I was with better than the later type of temporary gentleman which broke upon the world after 1917. I wasn't particularly horrified by my war experiences, most of them happened in hot blood and in the spirit of a game, I found I could keep my head

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in a bomb and bayonet fight and kill a man and laugh, and I had the luck never to see anyone broken up disgustingly or pitifully. Or I have forgotten it. Up to a certain limit a normal memory purges itself of painful details and so far as that side of things is concerned I came out of the war practically unscathed. I have forgotten the pain of my wounded arm, the anxiety of being shelled, fears in a raid, the stress of crawling exposed in the open between the lines. I know that I went through these experiences, but the facts are completely stripped of feeling now and I hardly ever dream of them.

The thing that haunts me most, curiously enough, is the feeling of being lousy and not being able to do anything effective about that. There are endless other memories of course but none that recur so often. For me the worst aspect of the war was not so much its dreadfulness as its dirtiness. It was, I realized, long before it was over, idiotic au fond and a bloody filthy affair on the face of it. It was not even 'a war to end war' as it well might have been in a saner world. That phrase was perhaps the premature squeak of a coming world community – and at the time I admit quite ridiculous. I stopped thinking of the particulars of the war from the day of my discharge. They did not join on to anything later. My mental direction is forward; I doubt if on an average I spend five minutes a day in recollection. I did not even blame those old men who were the normal scapegoats of the young in those days. I bore no particular grudge against anyone. Though

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maybe the next generation may find reason for bearing a considerable grudge against us. But my angry sense of an unnecessary exposure to the confused dirtiness underlying life, remained and remains.

I met Alice when I was on leave in England mending my arm. She was working in the art department of my father's publishing business (Bradfield, Clews and Wilbeck). He had taken the producing organization out of London to Durthing and the better to control its development he had moved into a rambling untidy house there. The war had held up his plans to a certain extent but he was carrying on as well as he could. 'Wars may come,' he said, 'and wars may go, but man's duty to thought and knowledge is eternal.'

I went to stay with him and I met Alice at one of the staff dances. She was a bright-coloured girl with alert brown eyes and quick obvious explanations for everything that came to her. Her imagination was all aflame for comforting a wounded hero and I with my arm in a sling was an entirely adequate wounded hero.

One of the unexpected things that happened during the Great War was a quickening of the tempo of sexual life for both sexes. Tempo quicker and the pitch higher. If I had Foxfield here I suppose he would be able to explain why that should be true quite as much of the young women as of the young men, but I must confess I do not see how it got at our woman-kind as it did. I can understand that youngsters like myself with the possibility of premature extinction

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continually under their noses, should be obsessed by the desire to have at least one good experience of passionate love before the end, but I cannot understand why it was that maidenhood lit up and met us more than half-way.

Alice and I were devoted to each other before the evening was out, we realized we had been created specially for each other's delight and solace, and we made the best of our time with a solemn exultation. We married as naturally. She invented nicknames, baby-talk, caresses and occasions for delight as though she was the very genius of love. My father disapproved of her and our marriage, just as he hated my early enlistment, he thought I was careless about myself but in this case too he made no insurmountable obstacles. She did her utmost to win by a brand of flirtatiousness devised specially for him. He was the sort of parent one calls 'Father', but she called him 'Dadkins Darling'. She had a playful way of kissing him on the bald spot on his head, and I doubt if he ever liked it. 'She's a bright girl,' he said, and it was the utmost praise I ever extorted from him. Even that was qualified by, 'I wonder what your mother would have thought of her'.

For a time she was fairyland and all the Venuses for me. Her youthfully slender body had a blinding loveliness. I could not understand why the whole world was not rapt in admiration at her wonderful sayings and doings. And yet all the while something was sitting in the back of my mind making observa-

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tions to her detriment. I never realized it at the time.

Later all that subconscious dossier came to the surface.

I left her installed in my father's house but when I came back for an abruptly truncated leave early in 1918, she had taken our infant daughter and gone to live with her married sister outside Durthing. She explained that my father hadn't understood the need she was under for friendship and cheerfulness before the arrival of our child and she had thought its birth would put him out. It was more convenient to be with her sister who had two babies already. My father explained nothing and said hardly anything about her.

I thought motherhood had changed Alice, she was plumper and whiter, her once deliciously slender neck seemed shorter and thicker and her figure fuller, and at first she was a little lacking in her old ardour. Then her interest in me revived. But with a difference in quality; there was none of the old animation. She became extremely sentimental in her sensuousness. She lamented our separation. 'Will this war never end?' she asked. 'You are the only man I have ever *really* loved — could ever *really* love. We are like Cupid and Psyche, a lovely dream in the night. Then off you go again.'

We had a little difficulty in being together; there was no room for me at her sister's house and she did not like coming to my father's, because, she said, of his coldness towards her. There were a lot of young friends frequenting her sister's; mostly people doing

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munition work at Dray, and the second act of our little love opera had far too much chorus in it and not nearly enough duet for my taste. Matters improved between us before I went. She spent the last three nights of my leave in my home and we parted with a great effusion of love, tears and tenderness, my father ignored in the background.

But things had changed. I can still recall quite distinctly the mood in which I thought about her, as I lay on the deck of the unlit hushed boat that was taking me back through the night to the muttering guns in Flanders. The goddess of desire, that incomparable being to whom unfaithfulness was unthinkable because there was no one like her, had evaporated from my mind, and a young woman with a sister and a circle of friends and a set of exceedingly commonplace ideas had replaced her. Making love which had been wildly beautiful had become an accommodation to urgent desire. Previously she and I had been two figures alone in a wonderful love dance, heedless of anyone about us. All that had gone. I had found something faintly but persistently antipathetic in that circle of hers. Talking to them was difficult and she seemed to share all their ideas. Like the early Christians they had their ideas in common. We had arranged to set up a household when I returned to England but we had found it difficult to determine where that little home would be. It was evident she would resist living in my home and that she would remain antagonistic to my father, to whom I was attached rather more than is

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the way with most sons. But she wanted to be close to her sister and her circle.

I came back after the war to solve the problem of my household, soberly and sensibly. She was my dear wife and I had to do the right thing by her. And – it was a material consideration with me as it would be with most healthy young men of my age – life with her in any conditions would be a relief from much celibate austerity.

But when I returned I found our affair had entered upon a third phase. She refused absolutely to come and stay with me in my father's house at Durthing and I went to her at her sister's at Dray. I had again that sensation of meeting a stranger that to a lesser degree I had already experienced during my second leave. Not for this woman was it that I had kept myself chaste in France. I found her not indisposed for her wifely duty, but any grace of passion between us had vanished.

The house seemed more encumbered by daytime visitors than ever. Among them I became particularly aware of the brooding presence of a tall stooping spectacled figure, George Hoopler, who seemed to be always looking mournfully at Alice and avoiding any exchange with me. He was not quite in the swim with the rest of her circle; he had an air of being drawn in. She had, as a matter of fact, drawn him in. She talked about him. He was extraordinarily clever, she said, 'practically an intellectual'. He had read all sorts of books and did essays and reviews in one or two of

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the weeklies. And he had been a wonderful friend to her and her sister in some quite undefined way. It was a pity I didn't like him. She was sure he could tell me all sorts of things about books. He was writing a poetic novel but he was telling no one about it. She seemed to know a tremendous lot about him.

At the time I regarded Hoopler as merely an added layer to the film of boredom that dimmed the Dray world for me. I had not the imagination to be suspicious.

'Let's get out of all this for a bit,' said I. 'Let's run off for a long week-end to Brighton and try and feel like old times.'

'Oh, not *Brighton*!' she exclaimed sharply.

'Folkestone,' I said not noticing at the time that emphatic rejection of Brighton, and to Folkestone we went.

And at Folkestone it came out. It was borne in upon me by successive shades of intimation that there was something – something very profound and serious going on between George Hoopler and Alice. I protested at the perpetual recurrence of his name in our talk. 'But if you understood him – !' she said.

I realized she was feeling her way towards the disclosure of a romantic situation. At first for many reasons I found it almost incredible. And it was George Hoopler's soul that came into the picture long before his drooping body. She made her revelation in her nightgown by moonlight at our bedroom window looking out upon the sea. She and Hoopler were soul-

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mates and they had carried mutual understanding to an almost orgiastic level.

'You mean - ?' I said bluntly.

'He is so tender,' she said. 'It is all so different.'

(That suddenly I guessed was why she had barred Brighton.)

My first reactions were primitive. I 'saw red', as they put it in the lower grades of the commissioned ranks. I was acutely angry. 'That *rag*!' I said. I had a preposterous vision of punching poor old Hoopler about, bending him in the middle and trampling on his glasses. Then I thought of giving Alice a memorable shaking and spanking and then in an unusual flash of comprehension I realized that that was precisely what she wanted. Because to hit a woman is complete condonation, and also she would have liked it. So instead I simply put her down with a bump in another chair and stood up and dusted my knees, so to speak, of her. 'You nasty little thing,' I said. 'Why are you here with me?'

'Because I love you too,' she wept. 'Because I love you too.'

The projected situation was submitted to me tearfully and in fragments while I dressed. It had many of the traits of a long prepared recitation but it lost much of its force because it was delivered to my moving back. 'Why are you putting on your clothes?' she said, breaking off short in the middle of it.

'Because I'm going to take another room.'

'But what will the hotel people think?'

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'They're not what one calls Great Thinkers,' said I.  
'It is I who will do most of the thinking to-night.'

I packed a provisional bag for the night and retired. She was manifestly surprised at my departure. I was not behaving quite as she expected; I was rather like an actor who had learnt a part out of another play. She had, I know, expected me to behave as though she was the only Alice in the world. So perhaps I should have behaved a year and a half before. And she would certainly have made it clear in the most effectual fashion that my loss was not irreparable, if only I would realize the essential goodness and purity of the Hoopler affair. But suddenly the world was full of Alices for me, one for every man and a few over. It is one of the things that a woman finds hardest to understand in life, that for a time she can be the only rapture in the world for a man, sole custodian and dispenser of delight for him, and then in the twinkling of an eye become just one individual packet of an overproduced standard commodity. It came to me that night as though I had known it for a long time, that Alice, my once peerless Alice, was of no more value to me now than any other passably pretty young woman.

I sat sternly in my new room for some time, no doubt with folded arms. I forget. I surely acted my part to that extent. I had been betrayed. My honour had been hopelessly soiled.

But gradually a feeling of release arose in me and irradiated my mind. I was surprised at my own

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duplicity. I knew I ought to feel all the fury of the cheated male animal and instead I only felt some – and it dwindled rapidly. A cloud of dull foreboding had been lifted out of sight. I need never find that little home poised between Durthing and Dray. I need never settle down to domestic life with Alice; sister and friends intervening. I need not be estranged from my father any longer.

My course became clear before me. She should have George Hoopler and George Hoopler should have her. All that I recalled of his behaviour since my uxorious return convinced me of that. He deserved her and I did not. He deserved her – richly. He was the sort of lover who for no particular reason *likes* to stand in the rain for a long time outside the house of the beloved. I was certainly not his equal at devotion. I dismissed a subconscious suspicion that I was being a little hard on Alice.

A strong streak of humbug in my composition came to the surface and spread all over it. An ignoble amusement in the little drama Alice had prepared swamped the last vestiges of the proper feelings of a dis-honoured husband. Abruptly I laughed aloud, stood up and went to bed, whispered to my pillow that I was a free man again, and on that thought slept quite happily.

The morning found me serenely sure of the part I had to play. I would ennable the situation and give Alice all the sentimental honours necessary to start her satisfactorily in her new life. She had found her true

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affinity. She had been swept off her feet. So be it. Why should she be ashamed of herself? I would be saddish but very generous and kind. I would recognize the essential if rather vaporous nobility of George Hoopler. Stern I would be, and *wounded*. Wounded to the quick. I even rose to saying on one occasion, 'My God! but this is *hard* on me, you know!' which she received with a sort of tender triumph.

I think she had a fairly satisfactory time between us though I doubt if it went exactly as she had planned it. She did her best to get a maximum of situation. She was dreadfully torn, she said, because she really loved us both. She did her best to dispel any doubts I might have felt about that, whenever we were alone together. I had not, she reiterated, lost my physical magic. Happily our state does not recognize polyandrous marriage or she would certainly have demanded one, a polyandrous marriage in a perpetual state of explanatory disruption. It would have suited her temperament exactly. There was a more realistic element of trouble in her thoughts, which I ignored steadfastly, about whether George Hoopler was in a position to keep a wife. I ignored that issue because I felt the situation ought to be sustained upon a higher plane. There was much unnecessary coming and going and several quite compromising interviews before and during the divorce proceedings. But I was set inflexibly upon renunciation and whenever I softened towards temptation under the influence of old habit I did my best to conjure up the image of George Hoopler inamorato

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but still wearing or trying to wear those insecure glasses of his, and generally that sufficed – at any rate to keep things in their proper proportion.

Upon one sensible thing I insisted. I would have no half-and-half measures about the child, no coming and going between Daddy Wilbeck and Daddy Hooper to puzzle her poor little wits and create difficult explanations for her later on with her school-mates. ‘You have to be her sole father now,’ I said to Hooper with a suitable break in my voice. ‘Let me be forgotten.’

‘You are *splendid!*’ whispered Hooper, clasping my hand. I have never realized before how greatly spectacles can enhance the absurder types of emotion.

I arranged with him and not with Alice for a special allowance for the child. I knew, and it turned out so, that I could trust him in that matter. She I certainly could not trust. She would have deflected that money to dresses – to treats.

I emerged from the affair at last in a state which I can only describe as over-disillusionment about love. It was not uncommon among returning soldiers. It was just as prevalent among the young women who had complicated themselves at home. You cannot clean up adulteries any more than you can unscramble eggs. I laughed – but not so very happily. I had a number of ‘affairs’ and none of them were very agreeable because in no case was I either really loved or in love. Not even while the affair lasted. For anyone with an imagination, promiscuity speedily becomes

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the dullest game in the world. But I went about life in a rather Byronic manner, except on occasions when my natural cheerfulness broke through.

My father was ailing and very keen for me to take up the business as soon as possible. Now that the war was over he was impatient to see his plans being realized — and they were very sound and far-seeing plans. I did not know that he was a dying man but I think he did. I have always found business a much more sustaining interest than women. I have always liked women I admit. In those days they deflected me powerfully, but my imagination of a publisher's rôle held me as no woman could do. Whenever I found sentimental tentacles wrapping about me in the wake of some sensuous appreciation, I would think of George Hooper and of possible other George Hoopers. I liked women but I found I could not dangle after them. Competing for them bored me. If they were only to be had that way, then the other chap could have them. My idea of love was a cheerful, natural reciprocity of help and pleasuring and a certain mutual flattery and reassurance — with no thought or possibility of third parties intervening from either side of the picture. Love, if it was any good at all, was an honest alliance of two people well suited to each other, against the impertinence of third parties. With laughter in it. So I thought. So I suppose I still think at the back of my mind. And still I do not know why we should not all of us pair off in that spirit.

Few men and women, I realize, succeed in getting

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things like that. But surely some do. I have been doing my best to fit my life to that pattern. For thirteen years. (It seems incredible but it is thirteen years!) They fit their lives together. Some do and I am not doing it; it is becoming more and more hopelessly uphill work and life is slipping away.

### § 4

In that time before the advent of Dolores I wanted the intimacies of a wife, a quite imaginary wife, very greatly, and at the same time I was persuaded that any intimacies of the peculiar quality I desired were to an extreme degree improbable. I pretended to be aloof in spirit from women, and in reality in spite of myself I watched them closely with an irrational fantastic expectation. I sought to maintain a cheerful cynicism in my incidental love affairs. And meanwhile Fate, with that humorous malice that so often distinguishes her, was steering me and Dolores through the world until we came together.

Our party at the Hotel Pension Malta et Syracuse consisted of my painter cousin, John Wilbeck, who has a passion for sympathizing with anyone who will stand it, his new wife, Virginia, Tom Gadsby who was and still is going to do remarkable things with the films, a young but platinum blonde whose name I forget but who was in a perpetual quarrel with Tom, Mrs. Percher the novelist and her husband Rodberry –

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Percher is her pen name and has survived two previous husbands. We all sat at the same table and bunched together on the beach.

But we were not a tight group, we frayed out and other groups frayed in to us. There were, I remember, three young women in languid pursuit of the arts and in active pursuit of excitement, two of whom were quite well off because their brothers had been killed in the war. There were a number of other friendly young people who fade off into forgetfulness, and a small, malignant-looking man with an excessive forehead and a bristling beard, every hair of which seemed to be trying most desperately to get away from the face to which it was inexorably fixed, spreading out as though it disliked its source and its fellows with an equally ferocious intensity. He was said to be writing a life of Stendhal or Dostoievsky or somebody like that. We talked literature, or rather the others did, and I listened as a mere publisher, we talked art and socialism and social science, that is to say, sex, we gossiped and speculated about ourselves and everyone within range in the most psycho-analytical and intelligent fashion, and we bathed a lot and played volley-ball and drank cocktails and gambled a little at Boule, and ate, and went to Nice and ate, and went to Cannes and ate, and bathed and went to St. Paul de Vence and Cagnes and the Château Madrid and La Reserve here and La Reserve there and ate, and so on. One eats so well in France. None of us were drunkards and none of us were gamblers and most of us were staying for three

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weeks at the outside. We had a tendency to pair off as the evening drew on, most marked when the moon was full and the evenings bright, and John, my cousin, watched me gently with his large grey eyes, or went about quietly behind my back, telling the story of my broken heart and expatiating upon the simple generosity of my nature. But of course that there was something to be said for Alice also.

I was, after my nature, a good deal amused and rather restless. I had never been on the Riviera before, the only France I knew was the war zone, and I found something pleasantly a little out even in the colour of the bougainvillia upon the walls and the fugitive cypresses all over the place, as though a cemetery hung with purple magenta had been raided and dispersed by the police. I liked the way the fronds of the palm trees, introduced from warmer climes, rustled and shivered in the wind. I liked the way in which the eucalyptus from Australia, like those self-sown weeds, the cultured Riviera Americans, seemed just as much at home as anybody. I liked the widely diffused refreshment, in such delightful contrast to our own morbid British concentration at the rare infrequent public house. I liked the way the houses were painted yellow or primrose or blueish-white or sang de bœuf, and patched never quite in the same colour, and I liked the unusual mongrelization of the dogs. Their ingredients made a sort of crossword puzzle of them I played a silly game of naming them, Dalmastiffs Irretrievers, Spanchow terriers and so forth. But I wil

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not expatiate on my appreciations; I mention them merely to show how unwarrantable were the sensitive whisperings of my cousin John.

I might perhaps have developed an insincere interest in one of the three detached artistic girls if only they had not had so much in common that I could never tell them apart. One was red-haired, one was dark and swarthy and one was dark and pale, but all the same I could not tell them apart. They shared their laughter, their smart remarks, their loud cries of surprise, their chortles – those were the days when bright young things ‘chortled in their joy’ – they shared these things as the Parcae shared one eye. I believe they interchanged their short skirts, their tanned trousers, their black and blue pyjamas, their exiguous revealing vests and shirts and their excessive berets. I had more than a suspicion that they considered me a laggard in love – a hard thing for a self-respecting, holiday-keeping, willing young man to endure – but all the same there was nothing I could do about it. I did kiss and fondle one of them quite a lot one evening until we were interrupted, but when it was too dark to tell whether she was red or swarthy or pale – and anyhow, in that atmosphere, that was a mere nothing. The next morning they all, I thought, had a slightly kissed and rumpled look. Maybe they didn’t know which it was themselves.

Dolores appeared in the Hotel Pension Malta et Sycracuse as an entirely more distinguishable personality, five or six years older than any of the three,

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already with that slightly haggard look of animation that has always characterized her, and I saw her first as a rather graceful slender back and a too stylish little hat bargaining very earnestly with Madame Hook, our proprietress. Fräulein Kettner stood behind passively but firmly in support. ‘And now,’ I heard Dolores say in a peculiar fluting voice that was soon to become excessively familiar to me, ‘since there are two of us, there must be a further reduction.’

I passed as quickly as possible because I caught the dread in Madame Hook’s eyes, dread lest I should overhear the ignoble concessions she was making and suddenly join in the fray exclaiming: ‘And now since there are *three* of us, there must be a further reduction!’

Dolores’ appearance in the dining-room that night created a sensation. Never have I seen anyone not looked at so hard and markedly. She was dressed with a kind of fashionableness that followed no known fashion, as though she belonged to the smart set of another world. Contrary to the spirit of the Hotel Pension Malta et Syracuse she was considerably be-jewelled, and her make-up had a richness that made John’s wife suggest she had recently escaped from some harem. ‘Armenian,’ suggested Mrs. Percher. ‘Eastern certainly,’ said Mr. Rodberry. ‘Something *tragic* in the face,’ said my cousin John scenting new scope for sympathy. ‘A camera wouldn’t make Anything of her,’ said Tom Gadsby and immediately the platinum blonde looked reassured.

Dolores’ companion evoked no surmise. She was

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the sort of Swiss German woman who can go anywhere and do anything without exciting remark.

Dolores had some critical remarks to make about the menu to the maître d'hôtel but these were inaudible at our table. Then for a time we gave ourselves up to the normal business of dining. I was recalled to Dolores by a nudge from my cousin-in-law. Dolores had produced a lorgnette and was surveying her fellow pensionnaires with an expression of mitigated disapproval. A lorgnette is such an elderly weapon as a rule that it made her look very young and bright. She delivered her impressions to Fräulein Kettner in a voice clearly intended to be audible. The hotel, the dinner, the company were all banal. It was what she desired. She could compose herself here. There was nothing to disturb her. At last she would be tranquil. For a time the lorgnette swept about like a searchlight. It rested on an adjacent group, it paused on John, it paused on me. It paused for quite a time on me. Then she spoke to her companion in an undertone and Fräulein Kettner looked at me also. She looked at me as a Swiss German botanist might look at an unusual flower. 'Damn the woman's impudence!' thought I. 'What right has anyone to set about making me self-conscious?'

The two women left the dining-room before we did and as they rustled by me I heard the faint tinkle of metal bangles and sensed what is now the familiar whiff of jasmin. But then, in those days of innocence, I did not even know it was jasmin.

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'Who the devil are they?' asked Rodberry, watching them disappear into the evening blue. 'I must have one of my private and confidential chats with Madame Hook.'

'That woman has suffered,' said my cousin John.

### § 5

Dolores' disposition to have an affair with me became very manifest during the next day or so. I shall be exalting my rôle in this little drama if I do not write rather vulgarly about it. It began as the common sort of thing that happens in hotels and on liners. I cannot now recall the precise incidents that brought us together. I had nothing to do with the first entanglement of our group with the new-comers. I discovered Mrs. Percher in a beach chair between two beach chairs listening to that fluent fluting voice – the voice that has flowed through my life now for a dozen years and more. 'Most women, I find, have no objective in life. I find a woman's life one long succession of banalities.' If Dolores was not saying that then, she was probably saying something else quite like it. I went on, to be accosted – an unusual thing – by that macrocephalic worn-out hair-brush I have already mentioned, the man who was supposed to be a high-brow translator. 'Do you know we have an Egyptian princess in the pension?' he said.

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'Does that account for the Turkish trousers and the gilt slippers?' I asked.

'I thought she was oriental from the beginning.'

But he had thought wrong. She was not oriental from the beginning. She had only been quite transitorily oriental. My own first impression of Dolores had indeed assigned her to nothing more oriental than France. I had thought she was a lady of some enterprise, possibly with a certain local social footing, something between an artist's model and, let us say, the niece or partner-daughter of a perfume or antiquity dealer, in one of the less ventilated streets of Paris. The sort of dealer who wears an embroidered smoking-cap and slippers in one of those streets which smell of sandalwood, where west is east and the Mysteries of Paris still seem credible. Or better perhaps Marseilles. I had never been to Marseilles but I had heard of Marseilles and from all I had heard it seemed just the place to produce her.

But I, too, was out. She was really Monégasque, the lawfully begotten daughter of a Scotch gentleman of family who spent his days trying to get into the Monte Carlo Casino somehow — there were official obstacles — before his wife could requisition his quarterly allowance. And on the other side, too, Dolores could boast of high parentage. Her mother was, I learnt, of peculiarly aristocratic Armenian origin (though hitherto I had been unaware that there was an Armenian aristocracy), a severe economist but otherwise a vivid rather than successful home manager.

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The ménage was neither happy nor unhappy but incoherent; the parents would probably have quarrelled even more bitterly than they did, if they had had a firmer grasp on each other's ideas of what constitutes French, and the cooking, I believe, was good even if the meal times were indeterminate. It seems to have been one of those cases where East meets West and everything gets very confused, and Dolores had revolted at a comparatively early age against the general disorderliness of her home.

The genes of some methodical Scotch puritan ancestor had emerged in her and combined with an Armenian quickness of mind had seemed to steer her straight towards success in school and to teaching, secretarial or literary work. But the variegated racial and social suggestions of her schoolfellows in her polyglot school, the general atmosphere of the place, various accidental encounters with men and above all what is called 'urge', had turned her face towards romance and a number of emotional situations, towards changes of domicile and travel; her career culminated in some sort of real marriage with a perfectly genuine Egyptian prince who smashed himself up in a car-race a year or so later and left her very poorly provided for. For a time she was undecided whether to become a nun or a nurse, settle down to writing the Romance of Her Life or what. She was deeply sensible of her essential brilliance and of great literary and artistic gifts, and in her anxiety to leave nothing undone, seemed likely to achieve nothing.

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The meretricious quality of her costume was due to the romantic adventurousness of her taste rather than to any definite vocation.

I cannot now remember whether my first tête à tête with Dolores was brought about by my initiative, nor exactly where it occurred. I am inclined to suspect the good faith of my memory in this sort of recollection. I have a loyal rather than a meticulous memory. It will do almost anything to please me. It has a quite different character from the rest of my mind. Probably I contributed more to our coming together than I can now recall. The morals of all healthy young men suffer in idleness and a single oncoming woman may have seemed more practicable to me than a trinity. I insist on this base and vulgar note because it was in that spirit that I behaved.

Men must be very old or very unworthy when they doubt the flattering confidences of a woman who attracts them, and I believed most of the story that she told me herself on the beach, amidst the tamarisk, in the evening sunshine and by moonlight. Fräulein Kettner was usually at some distance away, holding the little translator, who showed a disposition to follow us about, in a web of cultured international conversation. Dolores talked fluent English with a few Scotticisms and hardly a trace of French accent. She has in fact talked fluent English to me ever since, pausing only for eating, sleeping and interludes of passion. She talked about herself copiously and picturesquely and when she said ever and again, 'Tell me something

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of yourself' it meant that she went on talking, but about her impressions of me. Her faith in her own intuitions and observation has always been remarkable. Some few statements I got in edgeways and she at once turned them flat side round and made the most of them, and also she asked a few questions, concluding with 'Yes? No?' to give an indication of the number of words permitted in the reply.

'You loved your father? Yes? No?' – she did not wait for an answer because something else had come into her mind that followed naturally on the mention of the word 'father'. 'I loved *my* father. His complexion was like a shining pink cherub's patterned with golden fish scales.'

Yet in some manner she was able to get a considerable grasp upon my position and intentions. Her questions she thrust at me so that there was no alternative but to answer them or get up and walk away. I certainly told her how I had just inherited a stable publishing business with great possibilities and how I believe that publishing might be made a powerful educational force in the world. I was thinking out our *Way of the World* series then, and I sketched the project with the hopefulness of a young man. I remember her excessive enthusiasm. She came close to me; she turned the warmth of her face up to me. 'To think of you, so quiet, so unobtrusive, with those firm hands of yours, moulding the thought of the world! It is *beautiful*.'

I could hardly protest. I had asked for it. And

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indeed I liked it. My opinion of her rose with her opinion of me.

'The first time I looked at you I knew you were like this,' she said. 'My intuitions are very rapid,' and she heaped the most astounding flattery upon me. I was not like other men. I seemed to fill the world with purpose and so forth. But it is painful for me now to write down how admirable I was at that time. I do not remember how far I believed what she said but, what was quite as effective for her immediate purpose, I believed that she believed it. She exalted me, she made me so noble that for an evening or so more matters remained on the spiritual plane.

It was my cousin John who brought me back to earth.

'*How* that woman loves you!' he remarked.

'She has been telling you!'

'Yes. She has been telling everybody. Except those three English girls who cut her. What a wonderful life she has had!'

'She has gone into that too? About the ride across the desert and the night at the oasis?'

'She told me about that. And so *vividly*,' said my cousin John. 'And she told me your idea of organizing people's thoughts and ideas. It's wonderful, Stephen, how your mind has grown under suffering. It's a *splendid* idea - '

'She told you *that*!'

'It's fascinated her. She was full of it.'

'She seems to have - almost a passion for telling things.'

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'She's mentally excitable and forthright,' said cousin John.

'Yes. Do you know, John, at moments I feel as though I had gone bathing with her and she'd managed to drown my clothes.'

'You're not *really* a cynic,' said John.

I decided that there should be something between us that she wouldn't care to make public. But there I underrated her quality. . . .

Dim moonlight, the sacrifice creeping softly to me, the faint shivering tinkle of a bangle and a reek of jasmin, the trembling moment and the searching hands – thirteen years ago. It did not feel at all like being pounced upon and devoured. . . .

The next day I overheard her telling Fräulein Kettner; '*the perfect lover!*' She added an appreciated detail.

And at lunch time the three English girls would not see me, as markedly as possible. So evidently they knew and were either deeply shocked or deeply annoyed or both.

### § 6

That, I realize, was thirteen years ago. I thought at the time that this affair would be just an exotic version of various other kindred interludes in my bachelor life. I had liked the rôle of a consolee and I had no intention of abandoning it. I had still to grasp

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the fact that Dolores was a remarkable as well as a conspicuous woman and that she had formed a swift but very tenacious resolution to devote her life to me or, to be more precise, to assimilate my life to herself. For me she was an adventure but for her I was an acquisition. It was only gradually I realized how thoroughly I was being embraced when I was being embraced.

I could not tell the history of the next few weeks of intimacy with Dolores even if I had the will to do so. The record is obliterated. Nature has at least had the wisdom to make me anticipate honeymoon details very vividly and to forget them very thoroughly. Now that I find myself setting down my case of *Stephen Wilbeck contra Dolores* I am astonished at the extremely poor quality of the evidence produced by my one and only witness, myself. And yet the publisher of Otto Jenson's *Reality of Evidence* ought to have known better. Jenson deals chiefly with the reporting of events by intelligent unbiased people, circumstantial accounts of what they saw of conjuring entertainments, impromptu dramatic scenes and so on, and he stresses how widely they can differ upon quite vital particulars. He gives less material because he could amass less material about cases where bias was plainly in operation or where evidence was moulded by question and cross-examination. The hidden operation of self-love and self-deception he does not investigate. But his book demonstrates how enormously we can vary our conceptions, our quite

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honest convictions, of what happened a few hours before. And I am trying to tell not about material facts but of what went on in my mind and why I did this and not that, thirteen years ago. I doubt if one could do as much for last Sunday. I contemplate a considerable number of spoilt sheets, a certain amount of torn paper in the waste-paper basket, and suddenly I begin to be amused.

There are times when I find myself as amusing to watch as anybody or anything. I perceive a little chap who is still clinging to the assurance that he was something exceptional as a lover. It is nature's way with us. Few men, I suspect, can resist that dear delusion that the commonest of God's gifts is an outstanding distinction. Yet it is lavished upon the ordinary monkey far beyond our human portion. The facts of the case necessarily remain in a decent obscurity, but I think that in that particular respect my head was rather turned by Dolores. I was, I found for the first time in my life, a tremendous dog. I was a great fellow. I was an outstanding specialist. Casanova certainly wasn't in it with me. I do remember shamefully a sort of triumph I felt over the manifest and manifestly impotent rivalry of the little translator man and still more shamefully my appreciation of a sort of envy that mingled with the rich sympathy of cousin John.

These are subtle matters. Even setting them down makes them glare atrociously. But they are a necessary part of the story. Perhaps if one could tint the paper

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of a book grey, deepening in tone until at last the text quivered on the verge of the absolutely illegible — . . .

A lot better than a line of stars.

I must think over that idea of an Almost Illegible Series. I should return to a rather paler page and distinctive type with the fact that I also got a tremendous kick out of the suggestion that I had in me a kind of mental and moral greatness which made her ungrudging sacrifices to me a duty as well as a delight. She had been so aimless she said. She elaborated the details of her past aimlessness for quite long stretches. This aimless emotional Diana had done a lot of wild shooting and she dilated upon it with a regretful gusto. She had, she said, tried love, religion, patriotism in three or four countries, *and* the Communist party. She had tried art, poetry, literature with a sort of superficial intensity. All had failed to satisfy her deep physical and spiritual needs. Now in me and my great idea she found something virile, aggressive, promising and sustaining. My great idea was in fact in its new explicitness almost as new to me as it was to her, and I too found it stimulating. The more I considered it, the more I was disposed to make the firm of Bradfield, Clews and Wilbeck live up to it. How gladly in the measure of her abilities, said she, would she give her life to that. Fräulein Kettner was presently infected by her excitement and she produced a more nordic, more contralto, but equally enthusiastic, response.

I think these two streaks of gratification and exaltation were the main strands in the situation that was

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wrapping about me. And I know that at the same time I was acutely ashamed of myself. I did not want any audience to fan my smouldering self-disapproval. I liked Dolores to say all this stuff to me, but I hated to see her going off to tell it over to other people, and so perhaps I stuck rather markedly to her side to minimize her opportunities for overflow. That had a gratifying appearance of devotion. And in order to get her away from those others I professed a violent desire to be with her alone. I clung to an insistence upon the urgent need there was for me in England but at the same time I pressed – for the little time more I could snatch from that imperative duty – for isolation. So we went, all three of us, to a little inn near Vence, with myself of course as host.

I forget the dispersal of the party at the Hotel Pension Malta et Syracuse, nor even where my cousin and his wife went, and I am not very clear now about the details of that Vence establishment except that from it came a profound conviction that whatever other music is the food of love it is certainly not the shrill pipe of the mosquito. On the contrary. I couldn't stand the damned things. The landlord, his wife, his sister-in-law, the general servant, the man who pretended to be a garagist, and a large ambiguous woman in black who was probably a perennial pensionnaire, were all told about the peculiar passion and beauty of our relationship. Hitherto I had never met a woman who liked a chorus to her love-making. But Dolores has a craving for a chorus. Like her over-

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emphasis, her high-pitched voice, her emphatic make-up, her assertive taste in dress, it arises, I believe, from some deep doubt in her whether indeed she is really alive.

I am, I repeat, quite unable to say now whether I was what is called 'in love' with her. But then I have never been able to determine what 'in love' really means. In some ways I liked her immensely. I played up to her. Apart from her stimulating appreciation, her talk, which had still to become a boring flow of obviously imitative second-rate social and cultural stuff, could be bright and amusing. She looked – and even listened more at that time and she talked less automatically. Her rather vividly coloured and rather overdrawn autobiographical material was novel then and entertaining. It retained the freshness of early impressions. It had pleasing variations. Her pose of a profound and habitual pessimism was in abeyance in those early days. Sometimes she had real gaiety about herself – even nowadays rarely and uncertainly, she can be gay. And she could be unconsciously funny, which is always an endearing trait to me. The rites of passion would be suspended for five minutes while she danced round the room flicking a wet towel, giving ultimately successful battle to an intrusive mosquito and cursing in several languages. 'Peeng, would you? Damn you!' Flick. 'Aaah! Got you, my gentleman!' And then back in the most businesslike way to caresses.

She practised some marvellous exercises which I gathered were a combination of the best Swedish drill with the finer usages of yoga mysticism. They were

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well worth watching. Dolores in a state of nature holding her breath in an effort to send air by some entirely unknown route to her spinal cord and at the same time bursting to explain the esoteric wonder of it, was an exhilarating spectacle. I would say innocent but provocative things and she would gesticulate fiercely for silence. As if some yogi was listening and might overhear and stop the influence.

She had a sort of wildly inaccurate *savoir-faire* about food and wine, about dress and about social usage, that in those days, had not lost its freshness for me and seemed unlikely then to entangle or embarrass me in any way whatever.

But the business was calling me. The idea of turning our firm into a definitely educational organization which her first enthusiasm had helped to foster, was urging me to return. Something primitive, something lying not so very deeply beneath her crust of strange emphatic affectations, came up when I spoke definitely of departure. I realized with a shock how strongly, blindly and unreasonably she did not want me to go. She had no right whatever to hamper my going, but plainly without any acting or pretending she was going to be hurt, and I am a coward about hurting people. Abruptly our skies were shot with contention. I stayed on for two grudging days after the date I had fixed for departure and all the time she was extorting a promise that I would return, and she was trying to pin me to a date. I hate making promises because I have a strong tendency to keep them.

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She staged a great parting scene at Nice station, Fräulein Kettner as choragus to a group of porters and fellow passengers, and I had some difficulty in dispelling a proposal that she should come on with me as far as Marseilles. And I sat back in my compartment an extremely perplexed and promise-saddled young man.

Our gay little one-act play was over but the curtain had refused to come down. Expectation remained in possession of the empty stage.

### § 7

Never had I realized so fully the intensity of my desire to touch life with a light hand. I had told Dolores no lies, I had been quite as much the wooed as the wooer in our affair, and I felt this invisible thread of a promise she had put upon me, as an almost intolerable imposition. Nobody, I told myself, has the right to thrust this sort of obligation upon a fellow creature. Why on earth should I go back simply because she wanted me to go back?

Only it seems to be the human way to thrust obligations upon others. I remember sitting in my compartment and thinking of life as a wild scramble to entangle and get away, a fantastic arena of struggling people with lassoes, hooks, crooks, nets, adhesive ribbons, chains, handcuffs. My mind would admit no possibility of mutual enslavement and I held myself aloof from the general scrimmage, the cravings of

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possessive love have never arisen to me. And when presently I went along to the dining car I watched the grouping of my fellow-passengers with a new interest. Did neither of the married couple in the corner feel trapped and held? Was even that mother ministering to her three noisy children content to have lost her freedom? The young couple with their backs to me might be a returning honeymoon. Their poses suggested the extremity of detachment possible in indissoluble matrimony.

I kept my promise and went back to Dolores, but now the sense of a tugging leash between us was very present in my mind. The Kettner lady had returned to Switzerland and photography, and Dolores and I occupied a small furnished house she had found between Nice and Antibes. The flavour of matrimony in our relationship was growing stronger.

I married her because she declared she was going to have a child. To this day I cannot determine whether she really played a deliberate trick upon me or if she contrived to deceive herself also about her condition. I knew that she was possessed by an inflexible resolve to hold me permanently and that she was quite capable of a device of that sort. Did she not love me and does not love justify everything? She had assured me at an early stage of our relations that she was a barren woman but all that was now forgotten. The very intensity of her desire may have induced a belief in her own mind.

I am not very good at checking facts against what

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people tell me. I should have made a pitiful detective. Whatever the realities of the case were, the appearances were of a dismayed woman facing quite tragic possibilities. Abortion in France is a thing not merely illegal but intolerably unclean; it was hardly mentioned between us. She seemed to be extraordinarily alone. She was an only child, her parents were dead, and she seemed to have none but casual friends, recently acquired. Most of her previous lovers and friends she must have consumed; there were none left; but this did not strike me as significant at the time. I felt that this unexpected lapse into fecundity was my misfortune just as much as hers, and that our obligation to our prospective child was equal.

At that time I had no very definite ideas of how and where I should live. The lease of that old house at Durthing expired in another year or so, the place was associated with Alice and I had no particular wish to preserve those associations. I could give that up quite easily. In London I had a flat at the top of our business house in Carrington Square and this and two or three clubs made a foothold for me there rather than a home. It would be quite possible to set up a household with Dolores almost anywhere we chose. My thoughts ranged widely. I passed through a phase of indecision and then my imagination took control.

It did miracles in the way of adjustment to the new situation.

In the absence of Dolores it was possible for me to think out a rôle for her that would have vanished

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instantly in her presence. I thought of her as really subduing herself to co-operate with me in the schemes of educational expansion that pullulated in my mind. For some time like various other young English publishers I had had my eye on the continental market for English books. Tauchnitz, that honest and enterprising old monopolist, had been and was still hampered as an 'ex-enemy'. I had been looking into the possibility of an office in Paris. Now suddenly I perceived the attractiveness of a home in Paris, presided over by a startlingly exotic but really very intelligent and sympathetic wife. The child and a nursery would sober her down, I should sober her down, security would sober her down. It is amazing what anticipation can do with a person who is not present to hamper the imaginative play. I imagined a Dolores-Stephen baby — quite a brilliant little thing, mercurial indeed but with all my virtues. Several such prodigies. I remember distinctly a reverie to that effect. The letters I had from Dolores at that time were all asseverations of devotion. Her one anxiety was the fear least our child should interfere with her complete devotion to my interests. Far better would a Paris ménage be than any establishment in London or the English country. It would have an atmosphere all its own, and in that at least I was not mistaken. Every writer and all the younger critics, American and British alike, passed through Paris. One could catch them there and get them isolated as one could never do in London, bring them into contact with the

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new movements that were stirring – rather sluggishly at that time – among the younger Frenchmen.

A very hopeful phase indeed it was. Why had no other publisher thought of running the world from Paris? I conjured up a pleasant version of a definitely cosmopolitan Wilbeck, quite a fine figure, able to overcome, by virtue of this definitely Parisian domicile, most of that deep subconscious antagonism that bars out so many generous possibilities of co-operation between British and American writers. Dolores, more and more modified to fit into the picture, a sobered and dignified Dolores, was to preside over all this.

Time and tide wait for no one. Dolores' condition had to be considered. The sooner we married now the better. I came back to France and we married unobtrusively at the Nice consulate. There was a shyness about it all in my mind and I wanted the marriage unobtrusive. An old friend of hers who ran a costume shop in Cairo joined her and I caught Redmond Napier who happened to be in Cannes to play the role of fourth witness. And the effusive tenderness of Dolores for me was wonderful. She was unusually silent; she seemed preoccupied, she seemed less painted. She brooded and what could be more appropriate. She had something of the gravity of Mary in an Annunciation picture. But she was also extremely amorous. She was greatly distressed when I wanted to go back to England to make sure that everything was going well at Durthing but not so

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distressed as she had been before. ‘Now,’ she said, ‘I am sure you will come back.’

I wrote to her every day while I was in England, establishing a precedent that has since become an iron law. Things had got a little dislocated at Durthing and I had to stay longer than I had anticipated, three weeks or more, so far as I can remember.

And then the child began to evaporate. A sort of annunciation in reverse occurred. Dolores wrote that she was ill, extraordinarily ill. She wrote long letters daily. Nothing was going as it should have gone. She became tragic, she became inconsolable. The hope, the lovely hope, that had filled her, was dispelled. She had been cheated. From some of her phrases it seemed almost as though she accused me of cheating her. She had a growth. It was a growth, malignant in spirit if not in substance. She was ill, probably dying of cancer, frustrated, robbed of a woman’s supreme happiness, her life a futility, a heart-rending failure. She clamboured for me to come to Nice and comfort her – for it might not be for long that I should have that opportunity.

When I disengaged myself from various complications at Durthing and went to her I found her passionately reproachful. Why had I not come earlier? Leaving her, my newly married wife, to die in pain and solitude. In a lonely hotel – heart-broken. Who but an Englishman – this was a new note – could treat a woman so?

For a dying woman she did not seem to me to be

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very greatly changed, except that she had acquired several bright and becoming wraps for my reception and was wearing little else. I was afraid to hurt her in any way but she assured me she could best forget her sufferings in love. For most of the time she did forget them. Now and then however she would remember them and, at the most unexpected moments, emit a short, sharp cry of anguish. ‘My pain,’ she would explain. ‘Oh my pain!’ For a few moments there would be a pause and then life would be resumed again. Her pain has never really left her from that time onward. It has remained the same spasmodic inconsequent interruption. It leads to nothing.

Later we consulted a distinguished specialist.

‘And how is she really?’ I asked him when I had him alone.

‘Madame,’ he said, ‘is of a highly nervous type.’

‘Will there be any need of an operation?’

He shut his mouth so that it showed its maximum width, half closed his eyes and shook his head slowly from side to side.

‘I am much relieved,’ I said.

‘Naturally,’ he said with the utmost gravity. . . .

### § 8

In this manner it was that I married. I married to become the father of a prospective child, which turned out to be a volatile form of cancer and ended in an occasional spasm. I know that matters followed in

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that order but I am totally unable to recall to anything like reality the sequence of moods, the mental and moral goings to and fro, that must have occurred during that definitive period of my life. I suspect that I must have liked Dolores in those eventful days much more than I do now – by spells anyhow – and certainly so far as I can remember I took her word unsuspiciously.

I believe what I am told too readily. There is a streak of vanity in me that dislikes and dismisses the idea that anyone can cheat me. And partly also there is an element of laziness that shirks the trouble of scrutiny.

I certainly tried to settle down in this unanticipated life. I think that having shouldered my obligations I did make an attempt to play the constant lover to her. I tried my hand at little attentions, gifts, pet names and flattering phrases. By acting a rôle one may become that rôle. But, it is a queer thing, I never accustomed myself to call her ‘darling’ or ‘dearest’ easily. A nickname I found seemed always more sincere. I was shy of all positive declarations to her. I found myself in Paris trying to achieve a way of living with her, but my recollections of these early years insist on remaining in an inconsecutive jumble. Our behaviour towards each other changed but rather after the fashion of February weather, which is bright one day and stormy the next.

I suppose a vast majority of married people, and particularly those who come out of different classes or different countries, go through this intricate, repetitive,

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intermittent process of imperfect mutual discovery and imperfect compromise. I suppose I arrived almost unawares — the impression is built up by a thousand touches — at the realization that this creature to whom I was mated could never in any sense be mine or any part of an amplified or enriched me, could never be more than an inseparable alien auxiliary, always on guard against me, always to be treated with a self-protective, watchful disingenuousness, the last person in the world for bare confidences. So it must happen in countless cases.

And this absolute disappearance of abandon may have no deliberate quality of planned treachery on either side. We pass unheedingly from phase to phase. I believe quite firmly that at first Dolores threw herself into her fantasy of imminent motherhood in good faith; I believe she really saw herself as a devoted adherent of my aims and ambitions. I still hold to that. Only when she found herself married and installed in our fine large apartment in the Avenue Mitani, other more vivid and attractive imaginations just ousted these earlier dreams.

With a completeness — !

Since those early enthusiasms Dolores has disregarded my business, flouted my business and never hesitated to distract me from it. Since our prospective child passed its recessive phase, leaving nothing but a few incidental stabs of pain within call, my business has been nothing to her but a rival. Sometimes indeed she makes a great bragging before her friends, and

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giving away my private vanities and my hidden ambitions, proclaims how influential my group of writers is becoming and how rich we are. (Really we are not; the firm has grown big and muscular but I see to it that it secretes no fat.) Generally however when she turns a lunch or dinner party into an exhibitionist orgy, I figure as the ruthless man of steel and success, hard even in his vices, who has enslaved her sensitive and suffering and once so brilliant personality. In spite of everything I have done to her, she declares all down the table, obliterating every intermediate conversation, she loves me still. And so on.

For some reason I recall a mood in these early years very clearly. It survives like some letter in an old correspondence that has escaped a general burning. I see myself walking through our apartment one afternoon, I should think about May or June in 1922 or possibly 23. It was certainly our first year of married life. I must have come back to Paris by an earlier plane or train than I had said and she was out. Either the servants had taken my things or they were still in the hall. I was looking at her furniture and thinking her over.

How entirely I was out of harmony with this household of mine had never been so plain to me before. I felt an alien, a paying guest. This was not my home; it was the home, it was ruthlessly the home of Dolores. Whatever unformed desire for a home I had had, had been overridden. An obstinate, incessant will, none

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the less effective because it was narrow, limited and unimaginative, had set itself to frame a living place for me in which the long, loose, unencumbered activities that are the substance of my life, were resisted, deflected, broken up and frustrated at every turn.

Even my bureau was not my own. Dolores had successfully given me one of those great pompous writing desks without which the portrait of no French man of letters is complete. On it are massive brass lions with a sort of inverted top hats and holes for great candles bored into their heads, and a vast brass inkstand – I use a fountain pen – and a stupendous brass paper-weight. Its drawers all have bellies and at every angle where anything is to be caught there is that gilt brass stuff, which English people call ormolu. There is an equally impressive book-case behind this writing desk; stylistically not so much a brother to it as a distant cousin, bellying still more opulently – and the drawers below open freely only to some password still unknown to me. Though at times in my haste I try quite a lot. Both these pieces are much too large for the room and practically I live between them and the wall. Over the fireplace is a vast mirror and an armless twisted nude in plaster, and further, to emphasize what Dolores considers the virile note, there are paintings of meaty young women in a state of frank self-exposure on the opposite wall. And when we have a party, men are expected to litter their hats and coats all over this snuggery.

This bureau was furnished as a complete surprise

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for me while I was in England. It was a surprise, but I did not protest.

'It strikes a man's note,' she said when she introduced me. 'I know you like nothing elegant. But this has a sensuous gravity. It is like you. . . .'

I suppose a man can learn a lesson from any picture that is made of him. But I still cannot trace this particular likeness.

I have always had a bias for the pose of Democritus. I do my best to ease life with laughter. Even now, as I recall that dazed exploration of my own home I am amused.

I surveyed my drawing-room from various points of view, standing at one point for a minute or so, and then trying it from another. From any point of view it was unadulterated, invincible Dolores. It was preposterous how completely I was not in evidence. It was funny. 'Good old Dolores!' I whispered.

This was the room to which I was to invite rising authors, publicists, men and women of ideas, for the gravest, most fruitful of discussions. . . .

It was quite a big room with three great windows opening on the little Parc Mitani. Two round pillars sustaining a cornice broke its length. The style was roughly speaking, Empire-Louis-Quinze-Oriental Bazaar with supplementary Modern Maple and an overpowering flavour of exhibitionism. It was not furnished to live in; it was furnished for Dolores to show off to her friends, to explain to her friends, to triumph with over her friends.

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In one corner was a great bowl in which Chinese gold-fish swam gravely and sadly through life, sports and marvels, distended and twisted, trailing strange fringes. Everywhere there were little tables, life-size tables and dwarfish Moorish tables in inlay and bronze, a couple of sofas, easy chairs to be sat in easily, gilt chairs to be sat on gingerly, dangerous chairs on which exotic fabrics had been draped, there were oriental rugs on the shining parquet floor and oriental rugs crept up the walls. There was not a table, not a horizontal surface anywhere, that did not carry its burthen of bibelots, little unworthy pots, boxes, images, carvings, witnessing that in every age Satan has found some artistry still for idle hands to do. Little queer rare-looking books lay about, books no one would ever dream of looking at, or rather they did not so much lie about as lie where they had been put. None of this stuff was really interesting or curious. None of it had personal associations with either of us. None of it was rare; it was all to be found in limitless repetition in the shops of the Rue Faubourg St.-Honore and of its interminable sisters and cousins. It was just Dolores' idea of a proper background for our social life.

Hanging rather too high – as all pictures are hung in France – were various works of art – only one or two at that time, for Dolores had still to taste the joys of the not too extravagant patronage of the not too competent painter. There was an amateurish picture of the Hotel Pension Malta bought on the front at Cannes, and two of those life studies in which the last thing of import-

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ance is the face. For Dolores pictorial art means only one thing; the human body wrong way up. Pianos, thank God, there were none, for she hates music intensely as a rival. Her impulse is always to rustle and talk it down. Every light was shaded pink. And over everything there hung, there has always hung, a faint elusive flavour of incense, of pastilles, of recent battles and duels of perfume.

I sniffed, grunted, and went slowly to my other state apartment, my dining-room.

There also I was in an alien atmosphere. The room was generally sombre mahogany and upright. It was eminently fitted for that occasional serious eating and drinking which enlivens the habitually sane French dietary. But the jackdaw in Dolores had broken out over the sideboard in a clustering constellation of miscellaneous plates, all pretending to be specimens of great interest and beauty and dominated by a vast majolica plaque insisting upon the Rape of the Sabines, but always recalling to my mind, I don't know why — the rondeurs I suppose — that bustling cheese market at Alkmaar.

A small table by the window displayed all Dolores' best tea-cups and saucers. They had to be shown somewhere. There was also an elegant little ewer and basin on that table, happily the only surviving pieces of a set.

I turned back to that entangled drawing-room.

'Exhibitionism,' I whispered. 'Incurable exhibitionism. . . .'

Pause.

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'How the hell did I ever let myself get here?' I asked.

And presently answered my own question feebly.  
'One damned thing led to another.'

I became aware of Dolores in the hall. I walked a few paces to meet her tempestuous inrush.

'Dolores,' I said, 'I've been thinking over this room.'

'Well?' she said alert for praise.

'You ought to mark the prices of everything in plain figures.'

'What do you mean?'

'It's like a bazaar.'

'There *is* an oriental touch,' she agreed looking round with self-approval. 'A richness. Variety. It is a necessary part of my personality.'

'You don't think that for everyday purposes it is just a leetle crowded and confused?'

'It is vivid – animated. It is chic. What else could you expect? Everyone admires it. Even your stupid English friends when they come in, open their eyes. . . . But you have just arrived, my dear! You have not even got yourself a whisky-soda. Ah! I have another surprise for you this time – in your room. No. I will not tell you. I want you to be surprised.'

### § 9

Maybe that afternoon stands out in my mind because it was then I first realized the full dimensions of the task I had undertaken in assimilating Dolores.

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And with diminishing persistence and an entire want of success I have been trying to assimilate her ever since. But I did not realize until last night that it has been going on for thirteen years.

In a clumsy way and with a good deal of inconsistency I have, all things considered, tried pretty hard to work out a method of living with her which would give us a real married life, that would neither obliterate me nor involve impossible suppressions for her. My efforts have never been properly planned nor steadfastly pursued because my attitude towards her has never been steady. Sometimes I have thought her a lark, sometimes I have thought of her as a nuisance; at times she has seemed incidental; at times she has seemed fundamental. Even if she had wanted to consider me I should have puzzled her.

A larger circle of old friends than I thought she possessed gathered about her. Even old schoolmates from Monte Carlo, now actively settled in Paris, appeared. They were all competitively smart and self-conscious; they loved to talk about the great world intimately at the tops of their voices. For the first time I realized the tremendous importance early friends and old familiar associates may play in a woman's life. She did not love nor respect any of these people, but their reluctant approval, their admiration and envy were primary necessities to her existence. Their influence, the dogmas they laid down about clothing, servants, money and behaviour gave the patterns of her life.

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Reflecting upon this it seemed reasonable to me in those early years to assume that if I introduced a number of people of a different type and particularly English people with manifestly different sets of values, if in fact I changed her audience, she would change her performance to correspond. But though Dolores can pick up things very readily, she never forgets. She adds to herself, but early influences come first. And I am much too simple and she was much too quick, to give this attempt to change the atmosphere a chance. She detected and resented an implicit criticism from the outset. Her defensive mechanisms were alert at once.

I cut a foolish figure in these ill-conceived and half-hearted attempts at — *de-Dolorification*. They did not modify her; they intensified her. How was it that I could have imagined that she, whose essential life it is to pose herself and brag, could possibly be assimilated to a sort of life which has subtilized posing and bragging out of sight? I got people I knew to visit us in Paris, I took her for a tour to Scotland and I managed several long week-end visits at country houses in England. It is difficult now to count up how much of this sort of thing I did or to fix any precise dates. A publisher nowadays shares something of the social opportunities of the literary man, so many fingers of good family are inky now, and she shared many of my invitations. She was an aggressive, exasperating and disconcerting visitor for any hostess to entertain. She was on the defensive offensive from

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the start. She set herself with loud cries and startling costumes to shock, challenge and dazzle. She wasn't going to be taught anything by these people; she was going to overwhelm them. She was a terrible nuisance, but at times I must confess she was a lark. I must already have been getting rather tired of her monologue by the second or third year of our marriage and also I could never reconcile myself to her disposition to clamour to a roomful or a tableful of people about her intimate, even the most intimate, relations with me. Yet for all that, there was a kind of refreshment of her original shockingness, when I brought her, all unpre-faced, into some typically Anglican gathering, that had its amusing side.

At Clinton Towers, I remember, we arrived early and lunched with the family, governess and the three girls included. Dolores was inspired to talk about Sappho and the recent suppression of a book called *The Well of Loneliness*. She became so explicit that suddenly Mam'selle uttered a short sharp cry and – leaving plates of food unfinished – swept her charges from the room.

'Now,' said Lady Garron, rather grimly I thought, 'now we can talk freely.'

Dolores continued unruffled.

And also I recall a vivid question she asked some ex-missionary bishop, I forget where. Always when she gets hold of a missionary, Catholic or Protestant, she pins him down to an explicit cross-examination upon the question of native marriage customs and the

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Christian insistence upon decent clothing. Through a momentary lull in the conversation I heard her asking: ‘Tell me now, bishop, *frankly*, what is it you want to hide – is it deficiency or excess?’

Dolores finds the clergy almost as stimulating as they find her. I recall another occasion when I was smitten by a high-pitched ecclesiastical voice crying in evident distress. ‘I had *much* rather *not* discuss this question any further.’

I never found out what that question was nor what it was made old Lord Synagogue at a lunch party in Paris assure her with tremulous emphasis: ‘A Voman of your sort vould haf bin stoned in Israel. She vould haf bin *stoned*.’ Some little confidence I suppose.

From first to last Dolores never attuned her costume to the country house atmosphere nor would she listen to any suggestions on the matter. ‘My dear Steenie,’ she would say, ‘you are a bourgeois, you are a bookseller, a tradesman. You do not understand these things. From a Frenchwoman – and to them I am a Frenchwoman – something special is expected.’

They certainly got something special. To her sort of people in Paris, the English country house, is still a legendary land. To Dolores it remained a legendary land even when she was in it. ‘Le sport’ is supposed to prevail exorbitantly and feminine costume had to be adapted with a certain coquetry to the sporting idea. Moreover Britain is supposed to be the land of ‘le plaid’. So I treasure among my memories a lively picture of Dolores making an entry from the house

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upon the great terrace at Shonts somewhere towards midday, in a marvellous version of a highlander's costume in Stewart tartan, kilt and sporran quite faithfully rendered and an eagle's feather in the velvet bonnet. And another occasion when the theme chosen was a very large metal-buttoned red redingote with a velvet peaked cap, is also very vivid with me still. The afternoons had a voluptuous 'tea-gown' phase with great rings and necklaces and brooches and bangles and bangles.

'But my dear Steenie!' she said, when I tried to undermine this idea. 'Tea-gown is an *English* word. Tea-gown is an English thing. If these other women do not wear one, it is because they do not even know how to be smart in their own country. You do not understand these things. You nevaire will. You know nothing of this life of chic and leisure here. Naturally. It is not your milieu. If you were to come to this house a month later you would find all these women in tea-gowns like mine.'

'And do you think it is usual to wear all those bangles and rings and jewellery with a tea-gown?'

'It is what I do,' said Dolores. 'It is my style.'

She not only made these remarkable adjustments to our social English atmosphere but she affected a patently insincere interest in games. Her schooldays had ended just a little before the invasion of the convent schools by tennis, but she never realized how inexpert she was. She had a belief that presently in a moment she would get the knack of the game. It was a matter

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of great difficulty for hostesses to keep her high heels off the courts. ‘But I do not *mind* playing in my heels,’ she would expostulate. I did at last make her believe that she looked better in very chic white shoes and a gipsy silk handkerchief about her black hair. She would pounce upon a partner. ‘You shall play with me.’ A great favour. She moved with an active angularity that was practically independent of the ball. Her grip on the racquet was strange, a sort of forthright upholding.

‘Do not *tell* me,’ she would cry. ‘Do not show me! Let me play in my own way. . . .

‘*There!* I have hit it. . . . You see? I *hit* it. . . . Why did you tell me I could not hit it this way?’

From the sidelines she took possession of the game. She distributed praise and blame. She never ceased to give advice and urge the players to greater exertions. ‘Brav-O’ she would cry, ‘Brav-O’ and make a swift, sudden and disconcerting clapping with her hands. She liked the ball to go high. She liked it to go far. Many players found her applause ill-timed.

‘Steenie, you are playing *badly*. Play *faster*.’

Then perhaps she would lapse for a time into mere social talk. I remember hearing her tell Lady Garron, who I believe was some sort of county champion: ‘When tennis is properly played, you do not even *see* the ball.’

‘But then you do not often see it properly played,’ said Lady Garron.

‘But even as you play it here, I find it amusing,’

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said Dolores in her best great-lady style. ‘Why, after all, should one play like a paid professional? It is a game.’

### § 10

It must have been after four or five years of this sort of life that my disposition to get away from Dolores began to dominate my resolve to establish some sort of *modus vivendi* with her. Perhaps it was a little later. I cannot be certain. But I think it must have been round about nineteen twenty-six or twenty-seven that I began to scheme temporary escapes from her of a more elaborate sort than my little business trips of a fortnight or three weeks to London and Durthing. It was impossible for me to see people in Paris without her, but gradually I developed a private life of my own in London into which she did not enter.

Gradually I eliminated London from her programme. When it became plain that London was getting on her mind I would take her off to the Riviera or Rome or Oslo. And twice we had rough Channel crossings. Even on a rough Channel crossing Dolores suffered with outstanding distinction. It was a revelation. She made the most of it. But to be quite the sickest woman on a Channel boat is not really a triumphant memory. It left her with a diminished appetite for social triumph in Britain. And then in my schemes for book-selling on the continent I found it

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necessary to take a tour in Germany. She was still too vociferously full of war propaganda to want to go with me, and I had a pleasant time in Munich, Leipzig, Vienna, Berlin and Zurich. I went by air – in order I assured her to quicken my return. She was much opposed to my using the air services; she had an exaggerated idea of the dangers overhead and insisted upon a reassuring telegram; *sain et sauf, tendresse*, from every airport. For her own part she said the sea was bad enough. If ever she found herself in an aeroplane she would, she declared, jump out. Probably she would. But I could never get her into an aeroplane. It dawned upon me that business trips by air might be a very convenient way of repossessing myself of my freedom.

I developed this idea. I found business to take me to Oslo and Stockholm and Finland. I planned a bolder escape to America. She fought that, but I got away. I almost weakened to let her come as far as New York with me, but her dread of the sea deterred her. One of her friends happily had been sick the whole way across and the experience lost nothing in the telling. ‘Not even for you,’ she said. ‘No.’

I felt my humbug was improving on each occasion. I instructed the wireless operator to send a daily radio all the way across and I gave him six variations, ‘Triste’, ‘Mer houleuse’, ‘Pluie’, ‘Quelle banalité’, ‘Temps sevère’, and ‘Je pense à toi’, each followed by the obligatory ‘tendresse’.

And then I managed India. I got away with eleven

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weeks, but that was my maximum absence. I was also beginning to stretch my trips to England. I had cast a longing look at Australia, for there one might travel for weeks, no letters possible and only an occasional radio; I had even thrown out some preparatory hints, but by that time Dolores was already developing her present fever of suspicion and jealousy. At first I think she had found a certain release and relief in these lengthening absences of mine from Paris. It gave her little freedoms. There I was safely out of the way. I was a grand passion and all that, no lover was like me, but also I was a restraint. Then something set her counting the days when I was away. She realized that I was contriving a sort of fractional distillation of myself out of her life.

The more I was away from her and rested from her, the more alien and uninteresting and uncongenial I found her on my return. Whatever else she did when I was away she certainly acquired no new ideas and no new tricks. She seemed to be becoming less lively and more implacably quarrelsome. She had lost flexibility. The closer one came to her vanity the harder and spikier it seemed. And a certain hard maliciousness became more and more evident to me. Gradually year by year it was more definitely established in my mind that I wanted to get away from her just as much as possible. At first I had a little deceived myself about that. I had contrived to feel I liked her and still found her entertaining. Now I planned deliberately to establish barriers between our lives. My social life in

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England increased in interest and that I felt I must conceal from her.

Rather less than four years ago I did a foolish thing. My social contacts in London were increasing and I felt the need for a more commodious establishment, completely detached from the business. But I did not want Dolores to invade that. So without telling her I transferred myself to my present flat in Aldenham Square. Her letters I thought could still go to Carrington Square. This was a fatuous undignified trick to play, though I thought it amusing at the time, and before three months were out someone had let out the sinister secret. From that time onward her jealousy has been a spreading flame.

I took her over to see how harmless the place was, but she failed altogether to see how harmless it was. This,' said she, 'is a garconnière, nothing less.'

In Paris, in her world, there is no such thing as an innocent garconnière.

'You are the first and only compromising visitor,' I said.

'Bah!' she cried.

'But does it *look* like a garconnière? Does it *smell* like one? Is there a cushion or a mirror or a hairpin in the place?'

She stooped and picked up a hairpin, and handed it to me gravely; '*There* mister Steenie!'

'Point for you,' said I. 'That noble piece of old ironwork comes from the head of Mrs. Richman. She arrives every day at eight and stays until twelve.

## THE MARRYING OF DOLORES

You shall have another to-morrow, straight from the hair. But really that shows you! It is more convincing than nothing. The place you see, hasn't been swept for you. Find a fine lady's hairpin if you can.'

But since then my life has been preposterously propitiatory. It has made me more attentive and more enslaved than ever. I try and distract her with treats and excursions. The big blue car is a direct product of the Aldingham Square flat. This excursion here again.

Cars have always been an important aspect of life for Dolores. They determine a sort of social status in her world. She took the keenest interest in mine always and boasted about them to her friends before she became the proud registered owner of one of her own. Then for a time she became so car proud that I do not think she ever set foot to pavement except to cross it. And her insistence upon the correct behaviour of other cars became even more emphatic than before. For Dolores is a sort of voluntary road censor. If someone in a passing car sticks out a hand to point to the view, or swerves at all from the proper side or flaps things loose or scatters cigarette sparks or commits any such small impropriety, Dolores' head is out of the window in a trice, as we pass, her hands make denunciating gestures and her voice is lifted in high-pitched eloquent reproof that goes on long after the delinquent is out of earshot. Startled sinners hear that receding voice and, I hope, mend their manners.

## CHAPTER IV

## DOLORES AT TORQUÉSTOL

## § 1

DOLORES' arrival here had the quality of an important public event. I had been for a walk before lunch along the bank of a delightful weed-and-flower-trimmed artificial water-course that ripples along high up on the hillside. I had not expected her until the afternoon but when I returned I found Alphonse and the blue car, still largely encumbered with Dolores' luggage, outside the hotel, and Bayard seated right in the middle of the entrance turning up his nose at everything and everybody. Various pensionnaires were at the little tables on the balcony, pretending to take apéritifs but really memorizing for future digestion every detail of the car, the luggage, the Pekinese and Alphonse.

Alphonse I detest. Every human being has a right to a back and a front and two sides and to have the back and front curved in a reasonable and proper manner. But Alphonse is not properly curved; he sticks out behind suddenly as if he wore a bustle. It is an impertinence and provokes furtive ribaldry and laughter. And he has a singularly silly large pink face which also, in my judgment, sticks out, and his carriage has the rigidity of a waxwork. Dolores insists

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upon his wearing a royal blue uniform with pink collar and cuffs. The inspection of the pensionnaires was being very gallantly supplemented by the crowd of men and boys who sell postcards, straw hats, fans and suchlike litter, and offer guidance to the various grottos, lakes, chasms, views, churches, chapels, Calvaries and so forth, in the neighbourhood, to the people who come over in charabancs from Morlaix. The charabancs had still to arrive but were due now at any moment.

But the general air of the expectant crowd did not suggest that to-day they were waiting for the charabancs, but for something more individualized. As I crossed the road towards the hotel I realized that this something was me. The beam of all their convergent eyes felt like limelight.

As usual I was quite unprepared for my part. I walked as unconcernedly as possible. I should have advanced with a sort of trotting motion and asked, ‘Is she here? Is she better?’

A momentary distraction was caused by Bayard, who yelped sharply as the hotel manager in a state of hurried effusion – for the charabancs might arrive at any moment now – came out to meet me. Behind him seethed Marie, Dolores’ maid and rockbottom confidante. I acknowledged the rigid and reproving salute of Alphonse and turned to encounter the reproaches of the manager and Marie.

‘Madame was so disappointed,’ said the maître d’hôtel, ‘not to find you awaiting her.’

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'She is lying down now,' said Marie. 'She has had her pain.'

And then from the hotel passage behind them came a cry of exultation. Dolores in a revealing white wrap appeared right in the middle of the stage and descended the steps of the hotel.

'Madame!' cried Marie apprehensively.

'I couldn't *wait* for you,' she said. 'Pain or no pain. I couldn't *wait*. Why did you not stay indoors for me?'

She flung herself upon me. 'My *darling!*' she said. 'I forgive you.'

I take this sort of thing better than I used to do but still it abashes me. I struggled out of her clutching embrace.

I freed myself from her with difficulty and held her at arms' length. 'Let me have a look at you,' I said, to mitigate the effect of this disentanglement. 'How much better you look!'

'I forgive you,' she repeated. 'I shall *always* forgive you.'

She embraced me again with the utmost determination.

Bayard, who had waddled halfway down the steps suddenly yapped approval – or disapproval or something – and sat down, panting a sort of challenge at the world.

'Bis! Bis! Bravo!'

The charabancs for the first time in history had arrived unnoticed and were drawing up in their

## DOLORES AT TORQUÉSTOL

accustomed line opposite the hotel. A rude man in the foremost charabanc was standing up and applauding us.

I wriggled my head out of her envelopment.

'Where's the porter for the luggage?' I said, disentangling myself for the second time. 'Assist the service, Alphonse. Mobilize yourself.'

The charabancs claimed their meed of attention. The visitors were scrambling down, unguided, unsolicited, unprovided with postcards and souvenirs. This could not go on. Business is business however attractive the sight of passion in its full maturity may be.

'There's going to be a crowd for lunch,' I said. 'I'll try to reserve a table.'

### § 2

(*Torquéstol, August 24th, 1934*)

I am angry and at the same time in a ruffled and resentful way I am amused. I am disposed to laugh at things, but it is laughter with a split lip. We came here less than three weeks ago and by this time we are absurdly at cross-purposes with everyone and, what is by no means so funny, Dolores and I – in spite of my private good resolutions that it should never happen again – are in a state of active conflict upon a matter in which I am extremely reluctant to give way.

Let me in the calm and stillness of these small hours make a survey of the present situation. At first things did not go so badly. But after two or three days

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of amative intensity Dolores passed into her malignant phase. She becomes then the most uncomfortable thing on earth and she avenges herself indiscriminately. Troubles arise and thicken. Our present complex may be divided now roughly into two major and three minor rows. They are running concurrently and each one reacts in its own way upon the others, but the best thing will be to take them so to speak in the order of their magnitude.

There is first the trouble arising out of the unrestrained gallantry of Bayard, with the little pet of the Baroness Snitchy or Schenitz — I can never get her name right and the manager does not attempt to do so. I will call her simply as he does Madame la Baronne. That began about as soon as we arrived. For me before the arrival of Dolores, the Baroness was just a pair of pale eyes looking out from a heavily powdered face over a small sharp nose, from a corner table at mealtimes. She had a pale fringe of hair, a wig I suppose, supporting a small flat lace cap, and she was wrapped about rather than dressed in creamy and whitish shawls pinned together. When she walked out of the *salle à manger* she became a small, bent and quivering old lady assisting her movements with an ebony stick. She is, I now realize, slightly and unreliably deaf, and she assists her hearing with a small silver ear trumpet adorned with white lace. Her little white Pomeranian was a model of discretion before Bayard appeared. Then it was a case of love at first sight.

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But trouble with the Baroness threatened even before the Bayard incident. On the day of our arrival we made a rather belated entrance for lunch and while the distracted maître d'hôtel was in the kitchen ordering the special menu indicated for Dolores' dieting, some excursionists had commandeered the table I had reserved. It is one of Dolores' profoundest convictions that to begin well in an hotel one must be arrogant, and this seemed as good an opportunity as any for arrogance. Dolores surveyed the eating multitude with disdain through her lorgnette. 'Surely you could have put a card!' she said. And then to me, 'Which table did you reserve, Steenie?'

As I had no intention of throwing out our quite innocent supplacers by force I decided I had forgotten. 'One of these,' I said vaguely.

'A business man!' she commented. 'And he doesn't know.'

'In a moment, madame,' pleaded the manager, 'a table will be free.'

.. 'Which?' demanded Dolores, sweeping the room with her glasses, and putting the cowering pleasure-seekers into their proper relationship to her.

'One of these,' said the manager. 'Will you not wait a moment on the balcony? And a cocktail perhaps?'

'I came to this place for rest and solitude,' said Dolores. 'Cocktails are poison.'

'They are paying at two tables *now*,' whispered the maître d'hôtel.

Dolores weighed the merits of the tables he seemed

#### A PROPOS OF DOLORES

to indicate and reflected upon the table manners of her departing predecessors. ‘We shall need a clean cloth,’ she said.

Then she turned to me. ‘Steenie, give me your arm. I feel – . I may have my pain. Not even a chair free.’

By some feat of legerdemain a waitress produced and put a chair for her. Dolores readjusted it so as to block the service to the adjacent guests. But a table was rapidly cleared for us and the hors d’œuvres put before us. She forgot her pain. ‘No sardines!’ said Dolores, surveying the modest display. ‘Naturally, I desire a sardine. And tunny fish also. . . .’

So importantly we made our *début*. The old Baroness, who had hitherto been the Faubourg St. Germain, so to speak, of the *salle à manger*, watched our proceedings with acute disapproval. She called the head waiter and speaking with the extreme audibility of the deaf she indicated Dolores with her ear trumpet and demanded:

‘Who is she?’

The maître d’hôtel thought it no harm for us to hear.

‘Madame Wilbeck, the great English éditeur’s wife,’ I heard. ‘Previously she was a princess.’

It is remarkable how speedily hotels and shopkeepers learn about Dolores’ title. I never said anything about it – or for the matter of that about my being a publisher – when I took our rooms, but somehow in the brief interval between her arrival and

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my return from my walk our greatness had been impressed on the manager – presumably by Marie. As a princess Dolores is, I admit, unconvincing.

‘She’s no princess,’ said the Baroness.

‘An *Egyptian* princess,’ I heard him explaining.

‘*Quelle* princesse!’ exclaimed the Baroness with amusement and resumed her lunch.

I had done my best to drown that quavering and yet clear diction by a demand for the wine card.

‘Why do you bother about wines, my dear Steenie?’ asked Dolores. ‘In a place like this they will all be alike.’

‘I had some quite good claret yesterday,’ I said.

‘Your English judgments! On our wines! It is part of your national vanity.’

I shrugged my shoulders.

‘I find it endearing,’ she said relentlessly. ‘I don’t blame you, darling.’

I chose a wine, and the sardines and tunny fish arrived.

‘There will certainly be mosquitoes here,’ said Dolores, waving her lorgnette. ‘That younger waitress has either been bitten or – ’

‘I’ve never heard a mosquito here.’

‘Then she has an eruption of some sort. We must arrange she does not wait on us.’

Presently the manager passed us bearing a plate of food for the little pom. ‘Before our wine!’ remarked Dolores.

The Baroness received the dog’s food importantly.

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The manager laid it respectfully at her feet and the little dog sniffed fastidiously.

‘Dolly,’ she said, ‘eat.’

‘Did she say my name?’ asked Dolores sharply.

‘Who?’

‘That old hag in the corner there.’

‘Ssh.’

‘She won’t understand English. And besides, don’t you see, she has an ear trumpet . . . I hope *I* shall never grow old like that.’

Plainly the old lady knew how not to hear when it suited her.

‘Her face is as white as a clown’s. It’s hardly human,’ said Dolores. ‘And that nose peeping out. Like – like a mongoose. Maître d’hôtel, will you never give us anything to drink? Why are there no flowers on the table? But I love flowers. I need them. Even if we make an extra payment. I love everything elegant. It is in my nature. No. I don’t want them stale from some other table. I had rather go without . . . Steenie! I ask you. Did she mention my name?’

‘I think she called her dog Dobby or Dolly.’

Dolores made no reply. We were in the presence of a most attractive omelet. I knew she was hesitating between declaring she could not bring herself to touch a single mouthful, and taking the larger half. She took the larger half and I felt greatly relieved. When the wine came she drank it without comment but appreciatively.

But this was only a catspaw before a gale.

## § 3

I am fairly modern and liberal about eroticism, but the behaviour of the Baroness's Dolly really shocked me. And Bayard's was very little better. But it was, I insist, that shameless little pom with her yaps of admiration who began it. Directly she set eyes on him.

It was at dinner. All those unspeakable charabanc people had gone long since. The lunch had blown over and we had unpacked and Dolores and I had had a nice tête-à-tête. She seemed more at peace with the world. Our social life was running unencumbered. There was space and leisure in the salle à manger, bows, greetings and conversation between table and table, and only very subdued sounds of eating. The English mother and son who say 'Bon soir' to everybody and never anything more, were at their table, and so were the large family from Paris with the mother and father totally unused to guide a family through a meal in the presence of spectators, who were continually girding at their offspring and asking them what people would think of them, remarking also for the general benefit, 'At home you do not do that. You would never dream of doing so nasty a thing. You are excited. You forget everything. The gentleman there – yes, the nice English gentleman – is shocked at you.' There were also three bourgeois honeymoon couples, one couple rather gross and the others young and shy. The two English fishermen – or were they Irish? –

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had entered in a satisfied state from an excellent day's sport. There was also a lonely man with a vast smooth belly of a face, possibly a commercial traveller, in a shiny grey suit.

We had got about halfway through the meal, and Dolores was making a depreciatory inspection of the company and finding it 'banal', just as I remembered her doing years ago at Antibes, when Bayard, who had been resting from the fatigues of the journey, was brought in by Marie to assist at the meal.

Whether the pom was really under the urgency of passion I doubt. I am inclined to think that the misguided little beast was suddenly seized with a wild desire for play and canine friendship, and that she found some mysterious attractiveness, which was possibly quite independent of sex appeal, in Bayard. Her shamelessness may possibly have been the shamelessness of complete innocence. It is not for me to judge. But it was impossible to misinterpret the nature of his response to her advances. For a lady's pet there is something very coarse about Bayard. And the surprise, horror and disgust of the Baroness was equally unmistakable.

Indeed our first intimation of any incorrectitude was a loud cry of '*dégoûtant!*' from the old lady, and we saw her struggle to her feet, seize her stick, and administer a hearty thwack to our pet, before any intervention was possible.

'Come away from him, Dolly!' she cried. 'Come away!'

## DOLORES AT TORQUÉSTOL

Bayard yelped as the cane descended, but refused to relinquish his delightful, his most enjoyable companion. The stick was raised again.

'Madame!' screamed Dolores, standing up. 'Will you please to refrain from hitting my dog.'

'Madame!' returned the Baroness, flatly but loudly, 'will you please take this insufferable little beast away.'

The maître d'hôtel and I intervened promptly, and separated the dogs, leaving the two ladies face to face. I tucked up Bayard, struggling violently, under my arm. The pom, after a vain attempt to treat the whole affair as a great lark, realized something of the portentousness of the situation and retired behind its mistress.

Dolores was saying: 'I should have thought, Madame, that you would have realized the impropriety of bringing a chienne in that condition into the presence of other dogs.'

The Baroness was replying: 'My little dog is perfectly well behaved. It had no idea beyond innocent play. I do not know what you mean by its condition. I do not understand you. The suggestion is indelicate to say the least of it. Come, Dolly! Did that nasty dirty-minded little dog insult you!'

She resumed her seat with great dignity. Dolores resumed hers with even greater dignity. I remained holding Bayard. The head waiter hovered. Dolores regarded me with anger and contempt, all tenderness forgotten.

'Can't you put him down, Steenie, for his dinner?'

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'Hadn't he better go upstairs to Marie?'

'Is my dog to be driven away from me at the whim of a total stranger?'

I lost my temper. 'Damn the dogs,' said I. I put down Bayard as one who washed his hands of the whole affair and almost immediately he reverted to his supreme preoccupation. I did my best to go on lunching as though I was deaf, dumb and a bachelor in a dogless, sexless world. Meanwhile a great altercation arose about me. Marie, Madame Hunot, the maître d'hôtel, the spotted serving maid, the commercial traveller with the vast face, made various interventions. Happily the two principal ladies remained in their places. But they expressed themselves with such lucidity, length and vigour that for a time the actual proceedings of Bayard and his little friend were practically disregarded. Because of her deafness the Baroness did not so much reply to what Dolores said as make a series of antagonistic statements. Antagonistic and yet in substance closely similar, but delivered in a deep penetrating voice that reproached Dolores for screaming.

Both ladies found it necessary to assume an extremity of aristocratic poise, pride and authority. They were, we were given to understand, 'grandes dames' of a type rare since the revolutionary close of the eighteenth century. But their desire for an icy elevation was shot with a passionate impulse to sting and burn. Each wanted to indicate with the utmost acuteness her complete penetration of the unjustifiable

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pretensions of the other. In each a fishwife struggled with a queen. ‘Permit me to tell you, Madame,’ was really not a demand for permission. ‘If you will allow me to remark, Madame,’ brooked no denial. There were differences of style of course. The Baroness was disposed to sail across the sky far above what people nowadays are apt to call the ‘facts of life’, but Dolores true to her habit of keeping her conversation on the spicy side, unfolded a liberal-spirited, living and penetrating knowledge of the more passionate needs of canine femininity. Much of this discourse flowed over me. I did my best to keep my head down beneath the level of parapet and parados. Then I began to take notice again.

Dolores was talking in this style. ‘My little dog, I would have you know, Madame, is a pedigree dog and perfect in every particular. For stud purposes his attentions are priceless. If I cared for him to occupy his time in that fashion. Naturally your own little dog, who is, I should think, partly a Pomeranian — ’

Scrutiny through the lorgnette.

The Baroness was saying: ‘She cannot contain herself, Madame. Her sensibilities are of the finest. When she is locked in my room she shows her resentment in a quite unmistakable manner. It’s not only the noise she makes, Madame, though that is bad enough. She insists on being with me. She is a creature of infinite affection. A room without me is — dehors. It is *your* dog, Madame, that should be placed under restraint. I have never seen so ill-bred a dog. Never! It is these

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spoilt and ill-trained dogs who make the possession of a pet impossible. God knows what indulgence is shown him. . . .'

Suddenly I came to a decision. This had gone on long enough. I arose gesticulating commandingly with my table napkin. I contrived to knock a glass off the table and the smash stilled every other voice.

I struck an attitude like the portrait of an eighteenth-century general.

'Listen,' I said in a voice of authority foreign to my nature. '*All* dogs must go away! Marie remove Bayard. Never mind *what* he is doing. Remove him, I say. Detach him and remove him. Instantly. And you, Madame, if you will pardon my insistence, must banish that dog of yours also. Madame Hunot, I appeal to you, manifestly dogs must not be brought into the salle à manger. In many hotels it is an established regulation. You must make it an invariable rule, from now onward. I will not resume my seat until both have been taken away and this repast restored to tranquillity.'

'It is the only solution,' said the maître d'hôtel appealingly to the Baroness, 'Monsieur is right,' and I perceived that a sort of cheering was going on among the other pensionnaires. I heard one of the fishermen saying something about shooting the bloody little beasts. Madame Hunot gathered up the little pom and Marie fought with Bayard and secured him. Both the two ladies were conscious of having said good things and were willing now to eat.

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'So long as *both* animals go,' they said simultaneously, with an air of having discovered this satisfactory solution themselves.

'Why do you not always assert yourself, Steenie?' said Dolores as social order returned.

I perceived that in Dolores' present phase I might figure as the strong decisive man and anything in that rôle would be acceptable.

A sort of truce of mutual disdain set in between the two principal ladies and has lasted two whole days. In spite of Dolores' express prohibition I insist on bowing with profound respect to the Baroness whenever I encounter her. I will be damned if I am rude to old women to please anyone. The Baroness responds with regal dignity. After all Dolores is my misfortune, the old lady's bow intimates, I am not to blame. But to Dolores it is as if I acknowledged the primacy of her antagonist and we have had vehement recriminations about it upstairs!

### § 4

For two or three days, as I have explained, Dolores was in a tolerable state of mind. I was able and quite willing to keep her in a tolerable state of mind. Then she passed into her less amiable phase out of my control and her malignant side came uppermost. In these interludes one is subjected to unexpected storms, often of the most frightful description. There is almost

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always a scene at table when she declares herself to be suffocating with emotion and gets up and leaves the room. This time she embarked upon a development of our long-standing quarrel about Lettice of which I will tell later, but also she devised a new and formidable aggravation of the row with the old bleached Baroness.

When the phase of irritability is descending upon Dolores, either I go to England or I do what I can to relieve her tension by taking her about in a car or distracting her by shows and entertainments of a blameworthy sort. Then she is able to vent herself upon scenery, animals, strangers, the dispensations of nature, the arrangements of mankind, with a refreshing disapproval, always employing that intolerable French idiom, ‘*Je trouve –*’, which still jars upon my English ear as the quintessence of unsolicited ill-bred judgment. She finds this ‘banal’ and that ‘un peu stupid’ and so on round the whole compass of existence. ‘I cannot congratulate you, Steenie, on your choice of an excursion,’ she will say. She feels ‘bound to say’ this or that for which I can see no necessity whatever. Quite possibly it is an unsatisfactory universe in gross and detail but I see no reason for insisting upon it. So I do my best not to hear her verdicts, and when each has been delivered we get on to the next kill.

We were surveying that teeming Calvary outside the little chapel of St. Herbot and I was pointing out one or two points that had struck me about the Holy Family to Dolores’ evidently unheeding ears.

## DOLORES AT TORQUÉSTOL

All day she had been ominously silent and moody. She had let all sorts of things go by her on which she might have poured contempt. Suddenly she spoke. 'I've got it,' she said.

'Got what?'

'That woman. She is a leper.'

'Which woman? All the scriptural lepers I have ever heard of, were men. Do you mean that one there to the left? It's simply that some vandal has broken off her nose.'

'And what is more, Monsieur Hunot is aware of it.'

Something like terror came upon me. 'What are you talking about?' I asked.

'We can't stay in that hotel a moment longer unless she leaves. It's abominable. It's disgusting. It's revolting.'

'But my dear, what earthly reason - ?'

'I felt it in my bones directly I saw that awful white face. At any time we might get it - if only through the dogs.'

I faced Dolores in a state of desperate resolution. 'Look here,' said I, 'you cannot go on with this.'

'It's something to go on with - without a moment's delay.'

'If you see fit without rhyme or reason to proclaim leprosy at Torquéstol it isn't simply that poor old lady - '

'Poor old lady! Yes, my dear lover.'

'Who will be able to accuse you of libel and defamation. It will affect the Hunots. It will affect the

#### A PROPOS OF DOLORES

waiters. It will kill their season. It will affect the reputation of the whole place. Every one of them will have grounds for action against you – justifiable grounds. There will be a hell of a fuss, my dear. There will be no end to it. Never have you hit upon a more poisonous phobia.'

'As usual!' cried Dolores. 'As usual – in your customary sweet and generous way you are against me! You immediately take sides against me. My loyal beloved husband!'

'But what have you to go upon. The poor old lady – '

*'Lady!'*

'Hasn't any single symptom you can fix upon. Not one.'

'I tell you that woman is a leper. I know it. And there we are and there is everybody in that hotel – in danger. You with your insouciance don't care. You would live in filth if it wasn't for me. The worms would eat you. And simply to save yourself bother I may end my days in some leper colony, my hands worn to stumps, my nose dropping off. . . .'

'But – '

'Don't you see? Whether she's a leper or not I – I in my nervous condition – am in such a torment of fear that quite possibly I shall become a leper whether she is one or not.'

'She's no more a leper than I am.'

'Then have her examined! At least that could be done.'

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'My God, Dolores,' I cried, 'this is too much. I will not have you start a thing of this sort.'

'I didn't start it. That woman started it. Is it so extravagant an idea that she should be examined?'

'It's a most ingenious and intolerable insult. But let that be. Don't you realize it isn't only that poor old lady you attack? I say again, you are going to face lawsuits from the entire Torquéstol community. The damages will be enormous.'

'You're as rich as Croesus. Everyone says so. Only you grudge spending money – where either my health or my honour is concerned.'

'No,' I said, 'that won't do. If you drag me into a mess over this, every penny comes out of the provision I have made for you. Do you grasp that?'

'I will not eat my meals in the same room as a leper.'

'Then let us pack and go somewhere else and say nothing about it.'

'Give way to that old –' She used a French word I have never properly understood. I doubt if it can be understood properly.

'Give way to your fancies.'

'You and your talk of social service! You and your precious *Way of the World* series! A brave new world! Here is a whole population threatened with a most horrible disease and your remedy is to run away. Exactly like you. You just play with the idea of mending the world. You don't mean it.'

We got back into the car in silent fury and drove off.

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'Dolores,' I said presently, 'has it ever occurred to you that you might go too far with me?'

'Telling you the truth?'

'You understand as well as I do.'

'And this is the man I have held in my arms a thousand times!'

'Possibly more. But all the same you may go too far.'

'You are my husband.'

'Husbands have left wives before to-day.'

'You threaten me. I would follow you to the end of the earth. I would take such a revenge upon you. You think I am powerless. Any other woman and it is vitriol my dear. No jury would convict me when they heard my story. It would be a tremendous trial. My sketch of your character would be remembered.'

She seemed to find it an attractive prospect.

'Never mind about that,' I said. 'Nobody is going to be interested in your sketch of my character. It will just be all about yourself. I am just a poor publisher nobody knows. You'd be lost in my obscurity. The point I want you to grasp is that this leprosy invention of yours will be going too far with me. Think what these words mean, exactly, Dolores, *going too far with me*.'

'Fool I was, to expect a pretentious bookseller, a mere tradesman in other people's feelings, to be a lover capable of ordinary chivalry,' said Dolores and I realized she was in retreat. She went on with a survey of my unworthiness. The idea of giving a

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witty but excoriating sketch of my character and morals in a court of law, the court enthralled and all normal procedure laid aside, had stimulated her imagination and distracted her from the baroness.

The rest of the way we did not speak. She just sat in a reverie with a faint smile on her face inventing stinkers to say about me. Now and then she made the ghost of a rhetorical gesture with her hand. I drove the car with a grim and menacing air, inwardly well content with her silence.

That was some days ago now. She is passing her phase of maximum malignity. She is returning to normality. The Scotch in her blood is ascendant. She has taken what I said about endless litigation and damages to heart and up to the present there is nothing of primary importance to report on what I may perhaps call the baroness front. Dolores has not made an explicit charge of leprosy to anyone, even to Marie, and I think she means to tone down her great idea to 'some skin disease – or why so much face powder?'

Even that, she is not making into a positive accusation. She is insinuating it. Every day she delays action the situation improves and she can less admit an overpowering horror. She is insinuating the idea of infection by having tables moved and getting nearer the window and by large and ostentatious purchases of antiseptics at the local chemist. She speaks of the baroness habitually as 'that leprous visage' or that 'terrible decayed face', but this, so far, had been accepted as a merely common abuse and not as a libellous charge.

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At any time of course some accident may explode the situation, but it has none of the terrifying urgency it had some days ago.

That has been major row number one. The most pressing and immediate. If an explosion does come, either we shall be obliged to leave this hotel or, what is improbable, the baroness on her part may retreat. My impression is that the old lady is getting quite as much kick out of the squabble as Dolores, but so far she has not appreciated the point about leprosy. Even if Dolores does come out with that presently I doubt if the results will be catastrophic. Both ladies will certainly threaten litigation of an embittered type. But this will probably peter out in a diminuendo of threats and insults as their imaginations tire. We shall return to Paris; the baroness will go off to wherever she belongs and new and brighter quarrels will distract them both. It will all blow over. It is a large but it is a transitory disturbance. But our second row is of a more chronic and fundamental character. We take that about with us. I doubt if it will ever blow over.

### § 5

Our second major trouble turns on the existence of my daughter Lettice. As I think I told some way back I left Lettice with Alice and Hooper after the divorce. I thought that at the time this was the best arrangement. But there seems to be mixed up with a strong sense of obligation a curious philoprogenitive streak in

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my make-up. For some obscure reason, maybe because there is a sort of affectionateness in me that cannot crystallize about Dolores, my mind has begun to run on Lettice.

Let me try and set down the facts with as little gloss upon them as possible. What is there in myself that one could call my heart's desire? My desire gives itself an impersonal air. I want someone on whom I can lavish myself, whom I can pet, cultivate, assist, sustain. I say I want little or no return. That is what I say. But as a matter of fact I do want a return – rather I think in the spirit of those disingenuous old flower-sellers who demand no price, but 'leave it to you, Sir' – I want a very handsome return. I want to love someone in an easy unstinted way, I like watching people and forgetting myself in them, but also – which is quite a different business – I want to get a practically limitless amount of spontaneous affection and caressing in return. And there is more to it than that. My imagination craves association with some kindred mind which will by a sort of necessity and without any doubts at all enter into my interpretation of my life as a creative effort. I have doubts of myself, but Beloved must not have them. I want somebody to confirm my self-confidence, to keep me in heart with myself. It is, to use a trite phrase, a sister soul I desire, someone of whose close intellectual sympathies and very delicate and incidental amorousness, the absolute antithesis of Dolores' alternations of storming lust, limitless self-glorification and fantastic malice.

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Among other characters that the extroverted Stephen Wilbeck watches with detachment, acute interest and slightly qualified amusement, is one made up of the less ingenuous aspects of the heart of this same Stephen Wilbeck, a minor character in the Stephen Wilbeck troupe – Stephen Wilbeck, that complicated introvert, the tucked-in part of myself, my ‘ego-centre’. There has never been a time when this more intimate phase of me, at least, was completely satisfied with Dolores. Even in the extremest gratifications of the earliest days there mingled a faint flavour of shame and aversion and a sense that his desires were being detached from their proper emotional sequences and perverted and misused. My ego-centre does not blame himself for the perversion and misuse; he blames her.

I am doing my best to set the facts down here; not to justify the central or any aspect of Stephen Wilbeck. That is how it goes. Always in his mind, I suspect though I do not surely know, there has been a sort of phantom alternative passion, something better, something else, a passion altogether free from that faint flavour of appreciative cruelty he feels when Dolores is in his arms. That phantom, that antithesis of Dolores, that unknown woman smoothly quiet in her movements and low-voiced, that invisible third angle, is a very real fact in the marital psychology of the Wilbeck couple.

Long ago, Dolores, who can sometimes be extremely acute in her perceptions about this sort of

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thing, said that when I made love to her, it was always as if I was being unfaithful to someone else, my mind running on someone else. There was no abandon to *her*. And going on from that in her own vividly realistic way she has determined that there *is* someone else. The Aldingham Square flat has settled that beyond argument. Once her imagination has been launched upon the realization of a jealousy against some person or persons unknown, it has evoked a vision of things going on beyond her knowledge that torments her fantastically. It is a double-edged sword which wounds her the more it discredits me.

Why, she asks, should a man go away from a woman except to betray her? Since the only vivid interest she will tolerate in me is the interest I take in her person, she can concede me no capacity for any other sort of interest. Off I go then manifestly for amorous variety and novelty. And the less evidence there is for any unfaithfulness the more intricate, shameful and experienced must my deceptions be. The stiller the surface the deeper the sin. So she presents my dwindling interludes in France with her as mere resting phases in a terrific career. I suppose most men would prefer to be denounced as combinations of Casanova and Hercules rather than as unqualified Josephs; nevertheless it is a distinct embarrassment for a mild-mannered grey-clad Englishman to be cast for the rôle of Priapus exposed.

'My dear, he has been to bed with every woman in London!' I caught that magnificent sentence the

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other day as I came into the salon. Her interlocutor looked round with eyes bright with expectation – to see me!

When Dolores imagines the work of Bradfield, Clews and Wilbeck gets done, I do not know.

In her increasingly strenuous research for the Unknown Beloved (or more probable Beloveds) she is becoming more and more desperately unscrupulous. She scrutinizes my letters; one or two addressed in a feminine hand she has opened so to speak by mistake, and a week or so before we came hither from Paris, I found one envelope still wet and warm from the steaming. We had a scene when she discovered the signature of my new personal secretary at Durthing, Camellia Bronte in a fine round feminine hand at the end of a typewritten report. ‘That’s no name for a decent woman,’ she said. ‘More like a chorus girl – or a movie star. Have you begun to take her out to lunch yet? That’s how the seductive Employer begins, isn’t it?’

The idea of taking anyone out to lunch in Durthing garden suburb was bright enough in itself, but that the doomed object of my insatiable passions should be dear old Camellia, whom I have inherited, so to speak, from the late Lewis Checkshalton, and what a training he gave her! with her glasses, her stoop and her inveterate sniff, made me chuckle. ‘It’s going well; is it?’ said Dolores, interpreting my amusement as the gross self-complacency of a rake, and when Ridgeway, my leading publicity man, came over to discuss a little

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campaign of ours and lunched with us one day, she contrived to get him aside for ten minutes' earnest conversation. Afterwards I went with Ridgeway to look over the new Paris offices.

Ridgeway has little to do with my private life, but he is a simple upright good man, he had been deeply moved, and something weighed upon his mind. We walked along in an unusual silence, for he is by nature a babbling creature. 'That woman *adores* you,' he blurted out at last.

'She told you so?'

'Er - yes.'

'It's her phrase. And then?'

'She's worried about you. She wants to take care of you more. She's worried about what you do in England.'

'What *do* I do in England?'

'She's worried.'

'Then when you went to India and China - '

'Never mind India and China. What is the trouble in England?'

'These dactylos. I hate to say it. These little dactylos.'

'Ridgeway, do you by any chance know what a dactylo is?'

'They worry her.'

'She didn't say?'

'No.'

'Some special sort of vice perhaps?'

'I don't know. I don't really know. I know none

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of that sort of French. I know it's a suggestive language. But she's terribly worried about you. Not jealous you know, but worried. On your account. And it's dactylos. I am sure I got the word right.'

'You haven't heard anything about this - these dactylos - on the English side?'

'Nothing's come out over there. *Yet.* But she's worried.'

'She asked you to tell her anything you know about me and this sort of thing?'

'Yes.'

'And you did?'

'I reassured her. I know nothing.'

'And you don't even know what a dactylo is?'

'It's a sort of thing outside my curiosity.'

'A dactylo, Ridgeway, is the common French way of saying typist.'

'There's a lot of this double-entente in French, I know.'

'Oh! stop being a fool, Ridgeway. My wife is insanely jealous and she has learnt from American films and short-stories that American employers always have affairs with their typists. And what's the difference between an Englishman and an American in these matters? She didn't by any chance name the particular little - dactylo in the case?'

'No.'

'That's a pity.'

'You mean there really *is* one?' His expression was rich with reproach.

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'Yes,' I said contritely. And finding the note of confession irresistible I held it. 'My wife,' I said, 'thinks I receive too many letters signed Camellia Bronte.'

'What!' said Ridgeway. 'Our Miss Bronte. No!'

'She hasn't seen her,' I said.

'Gosh!'

'Gosh covers the situation.'

'I can't believe it.'

'Can't believe what?'

'Can't believe it of Miss Bronte.'

'But what can't you believe?'

Ridgeway began to readjust his mind. 'You don't mean to say that perhaps Mrs. Wilbeck — I beg her pardon, Madame Wilbeck, has made some mistake? You see, she seemed to say she sort of had it from you. That you practically admitted — . Boasted she said.'

'What?'

'Whatever it is.'

'Ridgeway, did your nurse drop you on your head when you were a baby? Or were you born like this? Did anything frighten your mother?'

He looked at me, his mind still going through elaborate phases of readjustment. 'Well, I don't understand this sort of thing,' he pleaded. 'It isn't the sort of thing that's in my line.'

'Evidently. I don't complain. Your essential — *integrity* of mind makes you one of the best publicity men in London. You think like so many people. But all the same before we drop this subject altogether I

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wish you would promise to do one little thing for me. At the last summer outing of the clerical staff, if you remember, there was a group photograph.'

Ridgeway nodded.

'Will you get a copy of it? Will you put an ink line round Miss Bronte. Will you send it to my wife with a note over your signature, saying "This is Miss Camellia Bronte," *the dactylo* in question? I am sure Dolores will like to see the object of her husband's – what shall we call it? – dactylomania. Dactylomania. We ought to tell Havelock Ellis about it. You will do that? Right O. And here we are at the new Paris office. Ground floor and a vitrine. What do you think of the window display? . . . It if attracts you it ought to attract most people.'

## § 6

This was my first plain intimation that my wife's steadily developing jealousy had come to the pitch of secret inquiries about my behaviour in England and of private denunciations. I realized only gradually that she was not only questioning every friend of mine she could get at, but also she was collecting and distributing gossip about me from anyone she met who knew or pretended to know about me.

Her range of information was wide. She had a varied circle of her own, remnants of the Monégasque and Egyptian days, later acquisitions in Paris, milliners,

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beauty specialists, decorators, odd semi-resident Americans, casual Russians. Mostly they were women of her own age, tremendous women of the world, all scented, all painted, all obscurely of the great world, dressed with a chic that hurt, possessing highly individualized styles, talking importantly or aggressively, whispering scandalously or being silent (yet darkly enigmatical and provocative) from corners of the room. Oh, brilliant women they were! Mostly they bragged to one another of their lovers, who seemed as a class reluctant to appear. But now and then someone freshly caught and still genuinely enamoured, would be handed round for examination. ‘*Mais il est charmant.*’ Otherwise there were few men mostly from the fringes of the theatre and journalism. It was all rather like a slightly tarnished realization of that smart Utopia in which well-made French comedies occur. With fewer men and still fewer titles.

There was much coming and going during my absences in England, teas and cocktail parties, lunches, receptions, premières, costume shows, scuttlings hither and thither, into which I did not think it fair to inquire too closely. Maybe I was treated as most husbands of smart women are, but I doubt it. I think she would have had to tell me about it. Dolores is a devil, but I should say she is probably much less secretive than most women. She has a sort of refractile honesty. It shows everything distorted and askew but it shows what is there. I think she has kept her love-hate pretty steadily focused on me – and that the only use

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she would have for another lover would be to throw him at me. Which, she realizes, in view of Alice's experience, would be risky.

But of course no man is ever sure. She has a wonderful French word 'passades'. She may have *passades*. Possibly with rather scared youngish men. . . . But it is better not to imagine such possibilities.

In this circle of her friends I was one of the outstanding lovers, so to speak, because I was lover-husband, a rare combination, rather exceptional and enigmatic. I was reputed to be intensely jealous, capable of great violence and cruelty, and when presently it became manifest that she was altering her tone, becoming really uneasy about me, almost everyone in this circle of hers was at once ready to supply at second or third hand or out of pure spiteful invention, suggestions and fuel for her suspicions. Her excitability makes her very transparent and I suppose her mortified anxiety amused them. She did not like to hear of things of which she was unaware and so she did her best to anticipate her friends' revelations. 'My dear, the things I could *tell* you!' And then – on the spur of the moment – she had, if not to tell, at least to make substantial intimations.

Thus insensibly and quite unaware I lost my irreproachable character and changed from the Loving Physically Satisfactory but alas! Preoccupied Petruchio to a Monster – not only in Dolores' accounts of me but also in her own mind.

So far as I can trace the rise, expansion and

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intensification of this jealousy of hers, it was hardly sexual at all in its beginnings. It was simply the natural antagonism of a feminine egotism in conflict with a man's increasing disposition to go his own way and think of things outside her personality and range. What is the good of boasting of a lover who does not incessantly dance attention and who cannot be kept waiting? At first I think she invented this idea of 'un-faithfulness' in England to justify her irrepressible tirades against my increasing absences. 'What does he do there?' she asked. But the next thing to that was to suspect, and from that to believe in a complexity, and strangeness in my conduct was a step for her. And from that to accusations of strange manias and perversions.

For a time she toyed with the pleasing fancy that I took the unusual course of going about the world to indulge for a change in homo-sexuality and then she was seized by a more brilliant idea. Her attention turned more and more definitely on my daughter Lettice and my increasing interest in her as suitable material for sinister suggestions.

Now, as I have said, I *am* becoming very interested in Lettice and increasingly anxious to see her and have her with me. It is quite recently that this began and I cannot trace what set it going. But I think my attention was first turned to Lettice by hearing that George Hoopler was in a shipping office in Southampton and not doing particularly well. He had long since abandoned his literary pretensions and his projected

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novel had either never been finished or never published or it had been published so obscurely and unsuccessfully that I have never heard of it. Lettice it seemed had been sent to a not very well chosen school, she had displayed no particular gifts and she was now preparing for an undefined business career in a local commercial college. Hoopler, I felt sure, had been scrupulously honest about her allowance but not very sedulous or clever about it, and he was making a very ordinary middle class girl of her. I thought I had better see how things were going. Partly my vanity was wounded that my only offspring should not be promising brilliantly, but also I think I felt a genuine solicitude for the young woman's prospects. Perhaps I had handed her over all too unreservedly to her foster father. So I astounded Alice by sending her a long and friendly letter, saying how frequently I thought of her and her happiness, asking how she and Hoopler were getting on and inquiring about Lettice. Was there anything I could do for the girl? For myself, I said, I was more and more wrapped up in my publishing enterprises and the years I found slipped by very quickly.

This led to a meeting. I invented some business to take me to Southampton and I had tea in the Hoopler ménage. It was, I thought, a rather dull ménage, though evidently a brave face had been put upon it for my reception. The little sitting-room was in a manifestly tidied-up state and what is called an ample tea was spread upon the circular table. A bow window

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looked out very pleasantly over the Itchen and in harmony with the view there was a nef on the upright piano, various ships in bottles and tinted engravings of ships. There was a reasonable extent of bookshelves and a number of magazines and weeklies on a side table. I had been admitted by a little maid-servant, and now an Alice entered the room, broader and stouter than I remembered her, but not too rouged and with her brown eyes as alert as ever. A pretty woman still, who had not done with life. At the sight of her I remembered things I had forgotten; her finely pencilled eyebrows and the pleasant twist of her hair over her pretty ears. She decided to kiss me and I accepted her reminiscent intimation at once and kissed her with a certain warmth and a touch of regret. And I felt it too for the moment. In fact we did all that very well. ‘You’ve grown broader,’ she said.

‘You’re just the same Alice as ever.’

‘Heigh-ho,’ said she, and then, recoiling hastily at the sound of feet in the passage: ‘We’ve told her you’re her godfather. Understand? *Godfather*.’

Two Hoopler children came in, a boy in spectacles and a fattish girl of thirteen, and after a minute or so my sixteen-year-old Lettice. I was happy to note that she was much better-looking than they were. I suppose any man in my situation would feel that way, and I did not reflect for a moment that thirteen is for girls and boys the unkind age when growth grows crazy, and that unless a girl is graceful at sixteen then surely grace is denied her. But Lettice was budding very

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prettily indeed, burgeoning nicely into adolescence; she was going to be as brightly winning as her mother had been when first we fell in love. My heart warmed to her. Her face was fairly intelligent but reserved and unawakened. She said little, but she had nice hands and moved them pleasantly as she played her helpful part at the tea table, cutting things, passing things. And after all why should a girl who looks delightful veil herself in premature talk?

So far as I can remember we conversed about Southampton and liners and travel, until Hoopler came in.

He was much more substantial than in the days of our romantic triangle and he bore himself with more assurance, he stooped less and projected more, and the convexity of his spectacles had increased. I realized almost as soon as he began talking that he was one of those mentally active, dull people who cast a shadow much larger than themselves. I felt he must have a very deadening influence upon his family. I remembered him as silent and inexpressive but that must have been because he was then in a state of profound emotional tension. Now he had something to say to everybody and always what he said led nowhere and expressed nothing. He greeted me with grave friendliness. ‘A poor house but mine own,’ he said. ‘That out there, that water, is the Itchen, but even up here we feel the Call of the Sea. Strange how it takes hold of one! The Island Blood. I come from Nuneaton but that doesn’t seem to matter. You see

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I've begun to collect these ships in bottles. Prisoners and Seamen. In spite of myself.'

How was one to reply to that? I had a wild impulse to respond, '*My Aunt was a Pirate,*' but I restrained myself, because I felt Alice might perceive I was pulling his leg.

He took up his tea cup and beamed across the table. 'And how is our Lettice to-day? More Salad than ever in that green dress.'

I was still rather at a loss though I felt I ought to do something. 'The son,' he said, 'is all for the air, aviator or nothing, though the Tang of the Salt Sea Spray is good enough for me.'

'Heart's Desire,' I tried.

'Perfectly,' he answered. 'Ozone.'

'And seaweed.' I felt I was getting on nicely.

'Alice Seconda,' he broke away, 'is all for the air in a different sense. Music. Hm?'

I struck out rather wildly with, 'Grateful and Comforting. Therefore play on.'

I had terrible qualms about my staying power at this sort of talk. 'Does it run to another cup, Mother?' I felt let me off.

He drank his second cup appreciatively and in the interval Alice remarked that someone must cut the cake. 'It's always so difficult, I think, to start a cake,' she remarked to me as one housewife to another. 'Then it's easy enough.'

'Break the icing,' said Hoopler but proceeded to no further brilliance for a space.

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So far the other members of the family had said nothing. Now in the pause the boy ventured to speak. 'My model flew – oh – a hundred yards to-day.'

'He means his model aeroplane,' Alice explained. 'He spends all his time and money making them.'

'Icarus,' said Hoopler and then with a fatuous smile: 'And I am his Dad – alas!'

I took that awful pun with a frozen calm.

'Orcus in saluto,' said I gravely and shut him up completely with these simple words.

That was a great inspiration. It sounded like Latin; it sounded like a quotation; it sounded like something a cultivated George Hoopler ought to know. He flushed slightly and an expression of baffled and uncertain scholarship spread over his face. He looked up at the ceiling trying to remember, trying to construe. Then his spectacle-magnified eyes sought mine in scrutiny, in vague suspicion. Was I ignorant? Had I misquoted? Or was I in some way reflecting upon him? But I was careful not to meet his gaze. I had been watching Lettice's pretty but subdued-looking face throughout these exchanges and I was forming a firm resolution to get her mind out of this singularly flattening atmosphere before it was too late. We might have been saying anything so far as she was concerned. She had acquired a habit of not listening already.

What are the rights of an alleged godfather? I asked myself. He has no rights but he has considerable facilities of suggestion and persuasion, and abruptly I asked Lettice when she was to go to college, as if it was a

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matter of course that she should go to college, and I began to extol the charms of undergraduate life at Bedford or Holloway College. Private theatricals. Painting if you like. Charming girls to make friends with. Good talk. Games. Rowing. Dancing.

'But?' said Alice.

'Why not?' said I.

Hooper caught up my idea very quickly. 'Could we have a sweeter girl graduate?' he said with elaborate generosity.

'But the expense!' said Alice.

'That need not overwhelm you,' I said casually, and turning to the boy I asked how many planes he had in commission.

It was evident that young Hooper considered me for a grown-up rather intelligent about planes.

I let the idea of the college soak in for a time and returned to it when we three grown-ups were alone together. 'You've done so much for her. Frankly I'd like to do more for her.'

They would not stand in the way. And Lettice under the pretext of showing me the *nice* way back to the station had a time with me alone. I liked having this pretty slip of life which was blood of my blood and bone of my bone walking along beside me. It was my first taste of parental feeling. It felt better than anything I had anticipated. 'You're magic,' she said, 'I did not even know I *had* a godfather. And you come suddenly out of the sky like this and tell me of colleges and going abroad and – everything. Are you real?'

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'Touch me,' and she stopped short and looked up at me with her head on one side, very much as her mother used to do, provocatively, and hesitated. So I took her by the shoulders and kissed her. We kissed each other. 'You're a *dear*,' she said, and we went on for some paces with nothing further to say.

There certainly was something very intelligent about her.

'You'll have to learn to speak good French,' I said, breaking the tension. 'I live a lot in France – when I am not working like a galley slave. Which is one reason why I have seen so little of you hitherto.'

On my way to London I found myself in a very pleasant sentimental reverie about this interesting addition to my world. I had, I decided, thought of her just in time. A most happy thought. She wasn't too late for education. I could do great things for her still. I would send her to college, see that she had some pretty clothes, take her out to restaurants and theatres when I came to London, confide her socially to one or two seemly woman friends I had made mostly in the course of my business, take her abroad . . .

She must learn some real French abroad.

I saw myself going about with her. At last I could have the pleasure of a feminine companionship other than Dolores', and without offence.

In spite of a hundred experiences of the smouldering malice in Dolores' nature, I wrote to her about Lettice. I had to write my usual daily letter and I overflowed into this topic that filled my mind so agree-

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ably. Dolores replied at length. ‘And so now, when I have grown accustomed to the tragedy of my barren life, I am to have that other woman’s daughter thrust into my face,’ she began, and went on to denunciations of my brutality, my intolerable bêtise. ‘And while you are supposed to be away from me on that marvellous business of yours, you are prancing about after that silly drab you had to divorce and her brat – which may or may not be yours for all you know!’ And so on.

‘Damn!’ I said and tore the letter and pitched it into the waste-paper basket and then recovered it and put it together again to afflict myself with one or two of the choicer bits again. ‘Why did I ever tell her?’

This time Dolores had succeeded in getting well under my skin, and I walked up and down my office in Carrington Square, when I ought to have been attending to my normal correspondence, raging at this wanton obstruction of my wishes. ‘If ever there was a born murderee,’ I said, ‘Dolores is the woman.’

That was three years ago and since then Lettice has been an intensifying exasperation between us. It is one of the few things I cannot turn into laughter. These are crucial years in a girl’s life. I am convinced she has considerable undeveloped capacity, but she strikes me as being unenterprising and rather self-satisfied, and unless she gets a good social environment soon and the stimulus of intelligent associates, she will settle down for life to a humdrum, undervitalized way of living. But I find myself altogether baffled in my efforts to save her. Just sending her to Permain

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College is not enough, because as the Head made very clear to me, girls gravitate into sets and groups according to the quality of their home lives and their temperamental dispositions. ‘She doesn’t go out to people and make friends with them,’ said the Head.

Unfortunately I have no circle for her. In London my life centres upon the Parnassian Club, I do not as Dolores would say ‘entertain’. Few people come to my flat, I may have a bachelor dinner or an author or so to tea; and the problem of this girl makes me realize the restless Parisian snobbishness and isolation of my alleged home. The best imitation of a cultivated background I can give her is to take her about myself and travel with her, and, since I have no available sisters or aunts or cousins, I shall have to find someone of manifest respectability with a daughter perhaps, to take charge of her in London. I should have taken her abroad before but for the certainty of a violent explosion on the part of Dolores.

Which brings me to a question, towards which I have been drifting for some time, whether I have not come to a point when a definite break with Dolores ought to occur – if only for my self-respect. She will fight and cling like a wild cat and scream worse, and I guess I shall have to pay heavily enough, but when I have got out of it and bathed my scratches, the freedom, the quiet!

Yet even that release is not certain. The marriage bond is a peculiar one and it is quite possible she will not let me go. Marriage gives an overwhelming

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advantage to the ill-disposed partner. No one realizes that better than Dolores. There has to be an element of collusive acquiescence in every English divorce. She will never again get anyone so close to her as I have been and am, and probably she knows that as well as I do. She would have to jab at comparative strangers and subsist on minor animosities. It is absurd to call her relationship to me love, but nevertheless I give her prestige; I am the dominating substantial fact, I am her main interest, I am the most powerful stimulant in her life.

### § 7

(*Torquéstol, August 25th, 1934*)

It was my cousin John who revealed to me just how far her wanton antagonism to Lettice had taken Dolores. John becomes more and more a natural born sympathetic go-between. Virginia has left him – for another man with whom she wants to settle down – but John just sympathizes with her, tries meticulously to find out whether she is *really* happy or not, refuses to be reassured about ‘that fellow’ and will not give her a divorce. ‘Some day, very likely she will need to come back to me,’ he says, and will not budge from that.

I see very little of him, but from quite early days he seems to have sustained a deep understanding with Dolores. He prides himself on understanding people,

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and understanding Dolores I think is one of his proudest feats. It must be a variegated understanding. He comes to Paris in pursuit of his artistic interests and usually when I am away, and then he and Dolores lunch or dine together and have good long earnest talks about my treatment of her. I saw him just before I came over to France this last time. His club, the Palette, is doing its redecoration and its members are visiting the Parnassian, of which I am a member. He came into the dining-room when I was lunching. He hesitated for a moment and then came across the room to me. ‘May I sit with you?’ he asked. There was something faintly portentous in his manner.

‘I’m fortunate,’ I said. ‘I’m just beginning.’

He gave his order and for some moments neither of us said anything. He was too full of his hidden thoughts and feelings to say anything to me and I never know what to say to him. I think he must realize the sort of quite unjustifiable contemptuous aversion I feel for him, but I am not sure. Usually I am able to treat him lightly and get a sort of sour fun out of – how can I say it? – his emotional contralto, but this time there was a marked absence of humour on my side, I know not why, from the start.

‘I see Dolores at times, Stephen,’ he began suddenly.

‘I know you do.’

‘She isn’t well. She says she suffers from insomnia.’

‘Don’t I know it!’

‘She isn’t looking well.’

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'I know. The blade – all too keen – that chafes its sheath.'

'She looks haggard.'

I misheard him deliberately. 'I wouldn't call her a hag. No. She overpaints of course, she is getting middle-aged and that seems to flurry her, she overdoes everything nowadays. She gets worse, John. Worse and worse. But not a hag.'

'I didn't call her a hag,' said John gently. 'I said she looked worn and haggard.'

'There is nothing that I know of to make her worn and haggard – except that having nothing to make her worn and haggard, probably distresses her and keeps her awake at nights and wears her out.'

'I don't know,' said my cousin John. 'I don't know.'

I thought matters might very well rest at that and I asked a few friendly questions about his painting. When was he going to have another show and did he like these conversation pieces that were getting so fashionable again? He answered me in a rather distraught fashion and came back to the subject of Dolores. 'You know,' he said and paused. 'I think Dolores is *very* unhappy.'

'Any suggestions?' I asked in the subsequent interval.

'That woman *adores* you,' he said. 'From the first she did. In those dear old days at the Hotel Pension Malta, I saw it. At the time it seemed something beautiful – a life's passion. She is not a woman who loves lightly.'

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'Good Lord no,' I said. 'Whom she loveth, she chasteneth.'

'It's all — her intensity of feeling,' he said. 'Never did a woman make the gift of a heart so completely. What comes easily I suppose is never valued. But it is true, Stephen, that you are making her *terribly* unhappy. I doubt if you realize that. This last affair —'

'What last affair —'

He shrugged his shoulders. '*Surely* you understand!'

'Last affair or any affairs. What are my affairs — supposing I have affairs — what have they to do with you, John?'

He pulled a face. 'After all I am your nearest relative. I *promised* to speak to you.'

'Promised Dolores?'

'Yes.'

'And now, if you will stop beating about the bush, what is it all about?'

'This child.'

'*What* child?'

'Your own flesh and blood, Stephen!'

He flushed. His eyes were full of indignant accusation. He was panting a little.

'John,' I said very gently. 'Are you saying something — are you insinuating something — just a bit horrible — about me and my daughter?'

He nodded.

'*What?*'

There are times when the Old Adam of one's composition urges one to untimely hitting. But the New

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Adam of civilization was sufficiently strong in me to save me from a scandalous and ambiguous scuffle with John in the dining-room of the Parnassian.

'I could not believe it, Stephen,' he said, red, breathless but uncowed, 'until – until Dolores gave me – well – practically chapter and verse.'

'What do you mean?'

He swallowed.

'Well?'

'Things you have said to her. Your tone in speaking of the girl. Dolores has an insight . . .'

'I'm not going to be separated from my own daughter because Dolores has a nasty imagination.'

'But consider the look of the thing.'

'Do you believe, John – ?'

'I neither believe nor disbelieve. Leave me out of it. Please, please. I judge no one. What matters to me is that Dolores sees in your daughter – it is really terrible, Stephen – her rival.'

'And you – ?'

'Never mind about me. I've not even seen the young lady.'

'Nor has Dolores.'

'She sees your infatuation.'

For a moment or so I surveyed the complicated excitement of my cousin's face. 'John,' I said abruptly. 'Let's come down to reality. Why don't you clean your own doorstep instead of helping make a mess on mine? Why don't you give that wretched Virginia of yours a divorce?'

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A pained expression came over John's face. 'If you choose to take refuge in an unjustifiable tu-quoque,' he said, and left the sentence uncompleted.

'It isn't even a tu-quoque,' he murmured, bending low over his apple pie.

'I admit I can give you back nothing as nasty as you have given me,' I said.

He looked up. His face was the face of a martyr. A martyr who has done his duty and who is finishing up his apple pie as though it was baked hairshirt and thorns. He really seemed in difficulties with his mastication. We stared blankly at each other. I remember observing that his large grey eyes had if anything got larger and the lower lids lower. He has bags under them and his mouth and his neck sag. He will make an awfully loose-faced old man, will John.

'What have I *done*,' I said, 'to have a wife who is a dangerous lunatic and a cousin who is a dangerous mutt? So this is the new situation. *Well . . .* I don't know what to say, John. I don't know what to do. I remain — flabbergasted.'

It was a poor word, it is a poor word at the best of times, but nothing else came into my astounded mind. So I repeated it; 'flabbergasted'.

'I've said all I have to say,' said John. 'I wish to God, Stephen, it hadn't been necessary. . . .'

For the nonce I too had nothing to say.

We were too nicely brought up to fling out of the room. We finished our lunch in speechless, in breathless, dignity.

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'No cheese,' said I to the waiter. 'No coffee.'  
'No cheese, thank you,' said John. 'Coffee upstairs.'

### § 8

I went back from the club to my flat boiling with indignation. This was too much. This time Dolores had got me infuriated as I had not been infuriated by her for years. She had discovered something at last that I could not take lightly. She had got through my defensive derision of myself and my world, to the quick.

I felt like beating up that idiot John and then going over to Paris and murdering Dolores, but plainly my feelings were no guide whatever to what I had to do. And moreover I realized that Dolores would rather like me to murder her, provided the thing was done in a properly dramatic and public manner. At least she would like the idea of it until I actually began.

Exaggerated ideas of the mischief afoot chased each other through my mind. If she was putting it about that I was possessed by an incestuous passion for Lettice, then plainly to discontinue seeing and helping the girl would be halfway to an admission of my guilt. I was in a cleft stick. The only thing I could think of was to rage across the channel and insist upon her receiving Lettice in Paris, going about with her and myself and wiping out this abominable slur upon both of us. Yet even then, she was likely to be the least

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desirable of companions to my shy and rather backward Lettice.

How far the slur had gone I did not know. It might have been invented as a special confidence to stir up John or might have been retailed as the last feat of her monster to all the Paris circle. At the time I was so much disturbed, so shocked into naivety, that I did not reflect that whatever story she told and however much it might be repeated, no one would really and completely believe this thing of me. Though up to a certain extent anyone will believe almost anything discreditable about you or me or anyone. It is a strange thing in the human make-up, the readiness to believe that the worst has still to be told about us. But they will believe only to the extent of an agreeable imaginative excitement. Their pleasure begins and ends at the pointing finger. But I do not want fingers pointed at Lettice.

It was only after a couple of unusually bad and entirely humourless nights that matters ameliorated and took on this juster perspective.

### § 9

(*Torquéstol, August 26th, 1934*)

By the time I returned to Dolores in Paris I was more or less my normal self again, resolved after my usual fashion to humour her as much as possible and

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by somefeat of evocation get her into a fit of generosity and persuade her to entertain Lettice in Paris for just as brief a period as may be necessary to dispel that nasty imputation. I am always forgetting my wife's inveteracy. To the end of our days, I, who am always easing off from my first crude, over-emphatic statements, will fail to comprehend the hard persistence of her malignity. She sticks to everything she can lay hands upon. She even sticks to every lie she tells. My disposition for give and take she interprets as weakness and she grabs the new advantage and yields nothing. When Dolores realized what I was getting at, it presented itself to her simply as a new means of vexatious assertion against me.

'This time,' said I, 'I will not let you thwart me.'

How many times have I not said that 'This time'! And weakened.

'I will not be separated from my own daughter by you or anyone,' I blustered.

'As bad as that it is! As bad as that! Infatuation!'

'I will stop your allowance.'

'I will sue you for maintenance.'

'I will *halve* your allowance.'

'I will bring divorce proceedings. Yes, Steenie. And very silly you will look among your dowdy English lady-friends, when I show you up. Your own daughter, your own, so far as you can tell, that is, as co-respondent! That will set all London talking if anything can. And she won't be the only co-respondent. No! All your friends are not as discreet as you are. I know

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things. And that secret flat of yours! Well, you meant it to be secret. . . . Have you never heard of private inquiry agents? I'll bring in that Camellia Bronte of yours. And others. That will put a pretty light on your *Way of the World* series and your New Humanity and all that. That will make tongues wag. So you'd better drop it, Steenie dear, before you push me too far. You'd better drop it. I won't have that nasty little Miss here pushing me out of my own apartment. Make a dactylo of her. That's all she's fit for. Put her with a dressmaker, if there *are* such things as dressmakers in England, and let her learn to work. . . .'

And so on.

And then within an hour or so I would be subjected to an amorous attack. 'I love you. *See* how I love you. Why do you misunderstand me so? Why do you do everything you can to distress me? I would do anything for you — *anything*.'

'Except . . .'

'Don't come back to that: don't distress me again. What woman would endure that? How fantastic you are. How obdurate!'

## § 10

Long before this trouble about Lettice began we had begun a standing dispute about two servants of ours, the Benniels, Marguerite who was our cook and François who was our chauffeur, whom for no reason

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I can fathom, she has set herself to ruin. The baffled feeling I have now about Lettice is just the same baffled feeling that I have had about these Benniels, but far more intimate, vivid and shameful. I was nominally their master and they were dismissed outrageously from my employment. I have helped them furtively, but I cannot induce Dolores to relent towards them. They occupy now an established position in her system of hates.

Yet they were her discovery. We came upon them by chance when we were motoring among the castles of the Loire. That was six or seven years ago. Dolores had suffered from a decaying pre-molar and had become very neurasthenic, the dentist it seemed committed remarkable villainies; Heaven alone knows exactly what; and I had come over to Paris to take her for a tour and generally assuage her. She had conceived a great dislike to tourists and tourist hotels – but then all over the world tourists detest and disavow and avoid tourists – and had set herself to discover in small unpretending inns, the slowly vanishing domestic cuisine française. Generally we found it far gone in decay and associated with primitive sanitary conditions and a great wealth of flies. But the Benniels we found were different. Their little inn was clean in all its arrangements, our lunch had an undefinable distinction – and they undercharged. They undercharged artlessly and unsuspectingly. The trellised arbour in which we ate looked out on a pleasant bend of the steel-blue river, and in the distance, seen through a

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group of slender trees, the château of Amboise rose like a cluster of quartz crystals above the lesser closer cluster of its town.

I was driving the car and we had no man with us. A man in the car bores me, and Dolores is apt to talk at him. Some little trouble had arisen in the engine and when I asked for a garage François offered to put things right for me and did so with skill and evident pleasure. He had been a chauffeur. He was one of those little fine-featured blue-eyed Frenchmen who are essentially handymen. I saw at once that the quite well-proportioned trellis about us and the grace of the garden were his.

Meanwhile Marguerite dished up and served us with a smiling skill.

They seemed to think us the happiest of windfalls, to find in me that legendary English milor that good French innkeepers in out of the way places still see in their dreams, and François made it clear he had never had his head under the bonnet of a more congenial car than mine. It occurred to me that here was just the pacifying resting-place Dolores needed to exorcize and banish altogether her desire to shoot that wicked dentist in the mouth and see how he liked toothache and generally vindicate herself for whatever he had said or done or failed to do to her. Here we could take up our quarters and make excursions to the various châteaux up and down the river, with a beautiful sense of superiority to the low, banal, hotel-fed, charabanc-carried tourist crowd.

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I threw out the suggestion and the Benniels were frankly overjoyed. Straightaway they became our old family retainers. Their little inn became ours body and soul. There was nothing they would not do for us. In the afternoon I rowed Dolores on the river and she praised the beauty and interest and infinite variety of France, comparing it to England, to the measureless disadvantage of the latter. I agreed.

Dinner was modestly perfect with excellent Vouvray. The moon appeared to have had its face specially washed and burnished for us, and Dolores forgot her tender face in her tendresse for me. Our room was spotlessly clean and before we retired Marguerite had assured us of perfect rolls and coffee in the morning.

'Where else would you find such *civilized* people?' asked Dolores.

'Where else?' I echoed.

Marguerite, it appeared, had been in service. She was ready to do any little stitching or ironing that Madame required. It would be a great delight to her she said, and remind her of happier, less anxious days.

In these benign circumstances Dolores blossomed out into a very great lady indeed. She was quick to avail herself of the services of a landlady who had once been a lady's maid, many little things had to be done for her, and as I smoked in the trellised arbour in a state of unusual contentment I heard a steady and most satisfactory flow of conversation upstairs.

Dolores was talking in a steady undulating flow and with the utmost refinement and condescension.

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Marguerite was replying with a responsive deference. She was learning very rapidly that I was a very wealthy man who published books not so much for profit as for the love of publishing and for the immense though unostentatious political influence it gave me, and that Dolores was a princess by a previous marriage, though she no longer used the title, and also, through her Scotch father and the Stewart clan, distantly connected with the British royal family. And also Marguerite was being questioned, about her past, about her present, about her passions. Had she no children? A son already in the army, that was all. The tragedy of Dolores' life was unveiled; her intense desire for offspring. Her passion for me also, her devotion, her insatiable devotion. Always, I learnt, I had refused her a child. That was new to me. Did Marguerite love her husband? Yes, but like that? There was an urgent pressure for details. Marguerite it seemed did not want to think too much of such things nowadays. 'Pas souvent. . . . Pas beaucoup. . . . Mais *non* madame. Pas comme ca. . . . Jamais madame.' She had other anxieties. The little inn was not paying. At times she regretted leaving service. . . .

Marguerite was a woman inclined to a wholesome plumpness with a sane and sweet and pleasant face, a healthy complexion and a quietly observant eye. I found it fixed on me with a calculating approval. She and I liked each other from the outset and we have always liked each other. But she was, I felt, doubtful about Dolores.

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Dolores had no doubts of her. She pronounced her a simple but highly intelligent woman, a peasant indeed, but with a remarkable understanding. Dolores spread herself before her as if she were a mirror, a particularly flattering mirror. So rarely was she understood. She told how she loved the beautiful simplicity of this inn. How weary she was of the stresses and falsities of social life in Paris, how corrupt, how immoral was the smart society in which she mingled, how she doubted at times whether she was not really intended for the religious life. If it were not for me she believed she might already be in retreat, a great lady-abbess perhaps. But she had me to consider. I was so naive, so dependent and so incalculable. She had to dress, she had to sustain a brilliant appearance for my sake — often though she was sad and weary at heart. She saw *through* things, but I was shallower and happier.

I did my best not to hear this expansion of Dolores, opening out, a great familiar flood, I did all I could to avoid being produced in evidence, appealed to and exhibited. From the outset I thought I noticed a certain something, a sub-twinkle, as it were, in the eye of Marguerite at these confessions, but as this twinkle did not seem to be perceptible to Dolores I dismissed it from my mind.

The little inn was not paying. Marguerite hesitated before she disposed of it and committed herself to us, and I know that it was because she thought I was trustworthy that she surrendered at last. She made

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all the business arrangements, because she was a managing woman. She managed the inn, she managed her husband, and when we installed her and François as our Parisian ménage I have no doubt she felt equal to managing Dolores and myself. And perhaps she could have done so. To begin with, things were a marvellous success. Dolores bragged of her cook and her good-looking chauffeur to all her friends. Unsophisticated indeed, she said, but the *vrai cuisine française*. And she talked constantly to Marguerite and told her her life story and her emotional experiences over and over again in a great variety of ways.

But obscure things happened during the time I was in Sweden. I do not know what happened, but quite possibly nothing worse than that Dolores suddenly became aware of the twinkle in the eye of Marguerite. Marguerite was something of a mimic. Maybe one day Dolores went quietly along the passage to her kitchen and discovered how she really looked and sounded to her devoted servants. If there was more to it than that Marguerite has never told me. Until that crisis, for the better part of a year our flat was more peaceful and comfortable than it has ever been before or since.

Then one day I returned unexpectedly to Paris to find Marguerite in tears, François in indignant revolt, and the pair under a fortnight's notice to depart. Marguerite, damp but doing her duty meticulously to the last, told me of the blow that had fallen upon them. François said nothing to me; he didn't know what to

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say, but he went about his duties muttering ‘merd’ – to Madame, to Paris, to the flat, to domestic service, to the universe and finally when he found that I was powerless to reinstate him, to me. Gently but distinctly he was very unhappy.

‘But why have you done this?’ I protested to Dolores.

‘Will you please leave our domestic arrangements to me.’

‘But you cannot possibly fire these people out without a reason. They sold their little place to come to us.’

‘Fine place they sold! They fastened themselves upon us. Like leeches.’

When I persisted reason departed. They were her enemies. Always I sided with her enemies against her. She could not live in the same flat with them.

‘I insist that you tell me more about this business.’

‘You insist – you insist!’ Dolores grimaced and screamed. ‘*My* flat and *my* servants. What was it they used to do in England? Dish cloot? Dish clowat? Do you want a dish clowat pinned to your tails, Steenie?’

‘*Hell!*’ I swore and she knew that for the moment she had won. The poor Benniels were bundled out neck and crop, Marguerite in reproachful tears, and I had to set about helping them furtively into a pitiful little back-street shop near-by. We had contrived to spoil their lives and turn all their bright expectations to bitterness, and it was I with my false appearance of firmness and trustworthiness, who had exposed them

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to Dolores' temperamental incompatibility – with any other human being.

That is the sort of thing that baffles me; something I can't turn off with a jest. I am made a defaulter in my promises, explicit or implicit. I can invent a laugh for nearly every other of our differences but not about Lettice or the Benniels. In both these cases I feel I am falsified and dishonoured, and that is a feeling that it is difficult to deal with humorously. I hate to see any servant or employee let down. These economic inferiors are essentially a weak class. They can be tiresome and exasperating at times, but what a life of deferential uncertainty they have to lead! And how could we live without them? Only a utopian re-organization of services could dispense with them. Almost all of them distrust our powers of interference and injury, and they do so with excellent reason. The Benniels banked on me. Marguerite with the tranquil face and steady eyes had considered me, judged me and after the fashion of her type, put her unlimited trust in me.

Since the expulsion of the Benniels our flat has seen a succession of servants, none of whom have gained any hold on my affections during their cycle of favour and confidence, sudden recrimination, persecution, notice and ignominious dismissal. I have preserved an Olympian aloofness to their storms and distresses. As the crisis becomes acute I hear the call of the business. Our present internal ménage is a married couple from Alsace, the Schweitzers, plus Marie, Alphonse and a

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maid. Marie is still in the confidence of her mistress. The Schweitzers are sinister and sidelong and very deferential. The man squints, has a lantern jaw and is very officious. He valets me fussily, he is butler at table; he has an assiduous usefulness. He is particularly skilful with the repair of small domestic gadgets and I should think he could pick locks. He is the sort of man who seems able to materialize in your room quite silently without opening the door. At first he seemed like developing a feud with Alphonse and I hoped for revelations, but now there is an understanding and Alphonse is welcome in the kitchen.

But if these poor dears conspire to peculate, Heaven help them when they are found out, for Dolores has a marvellous nose and no mercy for petty peculation.

### § 11

It is a minor matter but it is in the same vein, that I am on tenter-hooks about the spotted waiting maid. There is a queer streak of morbid fear in Dolores against infection, and short of leprosy, there is only one form of infection of which she seems able to think. Show Dolores a spot or a stain on a human face and syphilis leaps to her mind. But these particular spots are obviously the sort of spots with which God sees fit to mock the chastity of a certain type of adolescent. Dolores forgets about that maid for a day or two and then it comes back to her. I find the lorgnette scrutinizing the projected victim. One of these days

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I know she will get up and insist upon an inquiry in the bureau. I shall see her going off to the bureau with a peculiar intentness, with nervous but resolute movements of her jewelled hands. Useless for me to intervene. ‘This is my affair, Steenie,’ she will say. ‘This is *my* affair.’

If she does do so, it is very likely the Hunots will send the girl away. Of course if they are sensible people they will just pretend to send her away and arrange to keep her out of sight of Dolores, but I am not at all sure of the Hunots.

Again it is an almost negligible bother in itself and one, that but for my growing exasperation with Dolores, I might find indelicately amusing, that the English mother and son no longer wish me a cordial ‘Bong Mattong’ and ‘Bong swa’ and hurry past me with averted faces. But I feel rather than know fully and precisely what has happened in that quarter.

From me they are merely averted, but the appearance of Dolores produces a sort of white embarrassment, a strenuous, a convulsive blindness to her on the part of the son. He has obviously never cut anyone in his life before – and it affects his respiration, he blows, it destroys his muscular adjustment. On the part of Mamma there is a frank betrayal of shocked horror. She becomes more than normally henlike. She clucks to her son to come to her side. She quivers even more than the old Baroness and becomes incredibly haughty lest she should collapse altogether. She has, I realize, been shocked beyond measure.

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What has happened so far as I can guess has been that somewhere in the precincts, on the terrace perhaps after dinner, Dolores has accosted the youth and had a quiet talk with him. I know in fact that she asked him whether he was a virgin. First, because I know it is a common gambit with the women of Dolores' set when they meet growing boys, and secondly because the other night Dolores launched out upon a tirade against the hypocritical innocence and bashfulness of British youth. 'A French boy of his age,' she began.

'I know,' I said. 'I know.'

The sexual education of the adolescent male and the relative merits of the men of various nations as lovers are topics of inexhaustible interest to all those ladies in Dolores' brilliant rustling circle. The Americans as lovers are always understood to be no good, no good at all, and the English hardly better. They suffer under the stigma of sentimentality. They are excitable but inconsiderate. At the other end of the scale the vast but repulsive prowess of *le nègre* and *le gorille* are glanced at. Rasputin is a special case, still quoted. They go over this stuff again and again. They roll their imaginations over it. A lover ceases to be a lover; he is a technician, he is a violinist under the scrutiny of a *connaisseuse*. Affection flutters away from this awful stuff in infinite distress, rather like our scared English lady. The interest in the sexual apprenticeship of son or nephew is worked up to a feverish preoccupation. It is very important to save him, at any cost, from misdirected desires. There are aunts; there are

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dear friends ready to vindicate normality. There is a whole literature of the subject; deeply sentimental novels, very grave, very tender – for facetiousness would spoil everything. Don't for a moment call it pornography. It is literary conversation; it is sociology.

These things drift by me; I try to be incurious but I am neither deaf nor blind. ‘This is *my* affair, Steenie!’ At every age men must be taken care of and deceived for their own good.

‘Did he know what a virgin *is*?’ I asked.

‘He thought it was a religious young woman,’ she said.

Her indignation grew. ‘Steenie, that boy of sixteen – just leaving his public school and going to Oxford – did not know *anything* about virginity.’

‘Are you so sure? Maybe he didn’t want to discuss it with you. I suppose he looked extremely uncomfortable and got up and went away.’

‘Imagine it!’

‘And then you tried to have just a nice quiet little sit-down gossip with Mamma about him?’

‘She went scarlet and pretended not to understand. “I don’t understand *what* you mean,” she said – like that – and got up and walked indoors.’

‘Leaving you bursting with talk?’

‘It is stupid not to talk. What are we given speech for? God showers his gifts upon you English people – ’

‘And we practise reserve. Not so much as we did though – No. Why do you always rush sex to the front, Dolores, in any conversation you start with a stranger?’

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I took a chair and sat down by the chaise longue on which she was reclining. I had had some ideas busy in my head for several days.

'Am I going to be preached at?' she asked. 'On the score of decency? By *you*?'

I lit a cigar. 'I want to tell you one or two things,' I said. 'And hear what you have to say.'

'I could tell you more than one or two things about yourself if I chose to be plain with you.'

This time I really wanted to talk to her and I did not intend to be put off by an obvious repartee. 'This habit of bringing all your talk round to sex and filth. This perpetual lewdness.'

'Who did I learn it from?'

'I've never found out. Probably at your polyglot school down there in Monaco. It's' – I had a phrase ready – 'a contagious disease of the mind. And when we travel like this and meet ordinary decent people who are unaffected, it becomes an unendurable offence. Unendurable I say. This holiday since you joined me here, has irritated and bored me – '

'Is this another of your ultimatums, Steenie?'

'Well, it didn't begin like that.'

She sat up and adopted the defensive offensive.

'Stennie, I wonder why I love you. Why I *endure* you. There you sit, solemn, dull, a bourgeois bookseller, English, male – as stupid as a bull. You are like a heavy unteachable boy. Your only merit is a sort of uncritical sense of obligation.' ('I want to tell you,' I said.) 'Once I was one of the most brilliant women on

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the Riviera, accustomed to *gentlemen*, to men of title, to princes, to men of the world, to unquestioning gallantry. What am I now? What have you done to me? Everyone says that since our marriage I have become almost as dull as you are. You have robbed me of animation, of élan. The change they say is marvellous. Ask any of my friends, ask your own cousin John, ask your own business men who come to Paris.' ('I want to tell you,' I said.) 'And now you come to me like a schoolmaster. "I want a few words with you, Madame." Still I go too far. Still I'm not sufficiently banale. I suppose I am to look at you and catch your eye before I speak. I suppose - '

There was no stopping her flow of talk now that she was fairly launched upon it. The only thing possible now was to begin talking myself heedless of what she might be saying, and this I began to do. 'I want to tell you,' I said, and proceeded with my topic.

We had opened the engagement at a fairly low pitch but now that I was going on with what I wanted to tell her our duet rose in a steady crescendo. I said that this vacation had bored me beyond endurance, that the older I grew the less could I endure being the passive supporter of her extravaganza, that since I could not restrain her I meant to leave her and that at any cost I was determined to leave her for good and all.

We gathered a furtive audience, the Hunots inside the salle à manger, a maid below, two of the postcard sellers, a gentleman at the other end of the veranda

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consuming a sirop. Maybe there were others. As she grew aware of this accumulation of attention she changed over more and more to French to give them a fuller benefit of her discourse and she went faster and shriller, as glimpses of what I had to say got through to her, and might possibly get through to our hearers. Her curiosity to know what I was saying so steadily, was overcome heroically. On she went along her own line.

The two voices fought, a drum, a bass drum, trying to drown cymbals.

'Let me tell you, Mr. Steenie,' said she.

'I want you to understand,' said I.

It was ridiculous, it was shameful. At last I tried to rise with dignity and then forgetting my dignity leant over her to deliver a parting shot. 'There is a limit,' said I, repeating my worn-out refrain. 'There is a limit.' Unfortunately I marred my withdrawal by knocking over a small round tin table, bearing an empty glass and a tray which fell with a resounding crash.

'Please replace that,' I said to the spotted maid who appeared with suspicious alacrity upon the scene. 'Please replace and charge to my account,' and departed ingloriously, leaving Dolores reclining back on her chaise longue with all the honours of war, a great lady of the world, fatigued.

'Pouf!' she said for the benefit of the audience. '*Quel maladroit! Mon amant! Mais c'est drôle!*'

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### § 12

This sort of thing, this sort of jabber-battle, is the nearest I am ever likely to get to my wife's mind. Never will she listen; never will she attempt to understand. Whatever freakish interpretation she chooses to put upon our relationship, she will fight for with screams and vituperation. There is no dealing with her. I sit here now at my desk with this diary before me, asking myself what sort of entanglement I live in and just what I intend to do to escape from it. For in some way I will get out of this unendurable way of living.

Something much more thorough than I have done hitherto has to be done.

There are, I admit, these lengthening absences to exasperate her. We are both changing. I cease to laugh in my sleeve at her; I disregard her feelings as I never used to do. I scarcely hide my contempt for her tawdry sayings and doings. That secret laughter did much to keep alive the amused sort of affection I bore her. It seems to me, but that may be the effect of use and wont upon me, that her mind has hardened and deteriorated in late years. The last freshness of youth has departed from her. She repeats herself. Many of her topics came up like gramophone records. She talks more and more, she listens and reads less and her incessant self-centred flow becomes cheaper in quality and more monotonous every time I have to

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hear it. Quite apart from the discomfort her irritating aggressions create for me I am wearied by her endless reiterations. The forced and artificial buoyancy I try to sustain is less and less effective against her voice. I just cannot go on listening to it.

What is really the matter with her? What is the matter with us? We quarrelled about her indecent conversation. Why does she plaster her talk and particularly her English talk with clumsy outrages on the conventions?

Sitting in judgment on her here, I do not find she is really an oversexed person any more than she is abnormally crooked sexually. She is normally sensual and she is unstable, but she is not a wanton. Her pose varies from the great lady to the gaminesque. She is a gaminesque Mediterranean lady. She uses an abnormal quantity of shocking words and has a sort of sham-scientific scandalizing knowledge in this sphere, but though I find her tiresome and vulgar about it and though I think the habit grows upon her I do not find her disgusting. She is not really mentally obsessed. She talks simply to startle and shock.

Physical obsession with sex is a transitory state of affairs with an easy remedy, but imaginative obsession with sex is the most dangerous and incurable of contagious diseases. The mind afflicted becomes like that of a cocaine addict. The drive to talk about 'it', to elaborate 'it', to invent something unheard-of about this really very simple business, becomes uncontrollable. Perpetually the topic is obtruded, dragged

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in. Heman Soapstone, old Blades and Loretta Hook are the real thing, sexualizing everything, drooling their stale decaying obscenities wherever they go, like a curse put upon them. Pitiful and repulsive conversational lepers they are. Dolores isn't that.

It isn't a diseased imagination that impels Dolores to indecency, it is something quite different and innate; it is a devouring insatiable egotism. She must have attention, she must focus attention, at any cost – and she found quite early in life that the most effective way for a young woman to hold the attention of the guests at a lunch party or dinner party was to be frankly improper. A pretty young woman got a few glances and a few furtive advances, but everyone turned with raised eyebrows and an amused expectation to an animated young woman with no restraint upon her tongue, with a great collection of improper words and a penetrating voice.

And come to think of it, Dolores has no idiosyncrasies in any direction whatever, except this blank craving for notice. I have never known her do a really original thing. . . .

Light breaks upon me! Her gestures, her style, her costume, her scent, her accent, her mannerisms, her dogs and decorations, the values she sets upon things, her wildly fluctuating judgments, are a jack-daw collection picked up anyhow and gripped and held together with tremendous tenacity. She has accumulated this composite self because she thought its ingredients contributed to her effectiveness. There is no

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other principle of selection. It is an accumulated self, it is an undigested self. Most other human beings, the psycho-analysts explain, are under compulsion to do this or that irrelevant thing, they have an uncontrollable bias that gives them character, but she is under no compulsion at all to modify her plagiarisms and imitations. She has no repressions. She has a bright acquisitive brain, clear because it is unhampered by any internal resistances, and she learns and repeats, forgetting nothing, qualifying nothing, but intensifying everything because of the lack of any toning personal tint of her own. So far from being abnormal she is normal to the exclusion of an individual difference. She is a human being stripped down to its bare egotism. She is assertion and avidity incarnate. She is the most completely, exclusively and harshly assembled individuality I have ever encountered.

It is just because she is bare, like a planet without atmosphere, that she has baffled me so long. It is only now at last that I realize that she is just common humanity unmitigated. I have been getting down to that through a dozen puzzled years. So far from having to deal with a complicated person I begin to realize I have been dealing with a case of extravagant simplicity. I can't treat her as either a lunatic or a criminal. She is the foundation stuff of humanity. She is a common woman in a state of chemical purity.

And my basic structure and everybody's basic structure is woven of much the same stuff, but tinted, mercerized – is that the word? – glazed over, trimmed,

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loaded down? It is just the lack of that mitigating something else that makes her different from other people.

Now let me sit down and examine this instinctively fundamental human being from whom I have to detach myself. The first conspicuous thing about her is this craving for attention. (Are any of us free from that?) Why does she want attention? Why do any of us want attention? Is it a craving for love or, turning it inside out, hate? I don't think so. I doubt if any of us have a simple desire for love as such. What she seems to be after when she embarks upon one of her crescendos of showing off, is anything but affection; her nature is much more aggressive. It is to rouse a sense of inferiority and admiration in her hearers. It is to impose herself upon the absent and the present. It is to achieve a sense of triumphant existence. That is the climax of the orgasm. That must be held as long as possible. That is her simple and sole satisfaction. And it takes a malignant form because it is so much easier at any level to detract and hurt than to charm.

Now if this is true that Dolores is the normal human being stripped down to the bone, then this same fundamental drive to compete and feel one is triumphantly existent must be in me and you and all of us. It may be qualified or corrected in some way but it will be there. Let us for a change pin out Mr. Stephen Wilbeck upon the dissecting board. Shall we find a male Dolores at the heart of him? He doesn't shout, he doesn't brag and drown his opponent. No. Quite the little gentleman!

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But now consider what he does. I have been reading over the opening chapters of this manuscript, the part about the high road, the sunshine and Rennes and all that, and I remark how pleasantly he chuckles over and tickles and caresses every human being he meets, as though he loved them. He observes their rather petty activities, how lovably petty they are, he weaves quaint belittling fancies round them, notes their human absurdities. He does not obtrude himself at all, but he remains from first to last in his private imagination floating over them like a kindly divinity. The sense of triumphant existence – at least of successful existence – is the end sought in both cases. He gets it more subtly and skilfully and successfully than Dolores, that is all the difference. He does not try to rend it out of these others; he steals away with it. And instead of screams, threats, dismissals and so on towards servants, he gets the upper hand of them by creating a sense of obligation. Is there really a passion for fair play in him? Or does he merely like the people about him to feel that he is fair and trustworthy? Does he care for them as people or minions? I ought to know but I don't. Let us put a query to that. In the scales of a real divinity sitting among the stars, I doubt whether even on the score of ego-centredness the beam of the moral balance would kick against Dolores. It would tilt but not kick. Her egotism is crude and bare; it is more primitive; it lies naked – flayed – on the inflexible limitations of her life, and there it screams with resentment, suspicion and envy.

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He has an integument. As Foxfield would put it he is complicated by neo-morphs.

So, until at last now a fair challenge to his honour and self-respect has arisen, he has been able to get along by jesting about life, he has been able to profess a light heart, to evade and get away by himself, to deride Dolores' frantic struggle to establish a pride about herself, and to be scandalized at her flaming malice – against life.

That anyhow is the case for Dolores. . . .

But –

I am both judge and party in this private trial, and I do not see why a certain desire to pose before myself as an impartial judge, should bias my verdict against myself. I have stated her case and now I will put in a plea for myself. There *is* something between Dolores and me that is in my favour. Our difference is not simply that I am more subtle and elaborate than she. In many matters she can be much more intricate than I. But I am not wholly an ego, and she is. There is a certain good in me that she has not, there is something in my make-up going beyond my egotism, that I am justified in defending, even ruthlessly, against her devastating attacks.

### § 13

Since I wrote the last passage I have been for a cigarette-consuming stroll among the tumbled rocks of

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the gorge and returned to dine with Dolores in frozen silence in the dining-room. I hesitated at the post office whether I would send the code telegram to Durthing that would have brought me an urgent summons thither; 'printers' strike impending'. I decided not to do so. I detest these little deceptions. I am ashamed of them in my own eyes. I have played the fugitive hen-pecked mari of the farces too often.

The salle à manger was pervaded by an air of general crisis, and the most persistent sound was the soft rustling of the old Baroness as she turned to scrutinize one table after another. 'What *can* have happened?' her lorgnette inquired. Particularly of me. The English mother and son never said a word; they read books. The son's ears were bright scarlet and he moved rarely and stiffly.

There was only one fisherman. He dined rather early and when he had dined he sat for a moment staring in front of him, said '*God!*' with a note of extreme astonishment and got up and departed. Some newcomers remained mouselike throughout. A momentary impulse to speech was caused by the spotted girl dropping and breaking three plates suddenly and dreadfully, but nothing came of it. She wailed for a moment but the stern stillness overcame her. We lapsed into rigor as she sniffed and picked up the fragments. For a few moments Monsieur Hunot surveyed the company over the frosted glass of the door, but he did not make his usual round of amiability. His heart failed him.

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I wondered whether I had not made a mistake about that telegram.

After dinner Dolores got up, stood still, and looked at me very meaningfully. I stood to attention. She bowed and passed me with dignity. I went out on the veranda to smoke and drink some brandy — I felt I needed brandy — and presently Marie came with a note.

‘My love,

‘You sat at dinner like a small, pudgy, obstinate, wicked little boy. You are wrong, you are so *wrong*, so wrong-hearted — but like a child. My heart goes out to you. I cannot let the sun go down upon my wrath. I forgive you. I cannot sleep in hate. Give me one little moment, open my door and say “Good night” to me. Then I will take my Semondyle and sleep. Remember I am in pain and still very ill. You know nothing of pain. Some day perhaps you will. It will be good for you. But maybe then I shall sleep and stop thinking of that incompetent fool of a dentist who has ravaged my life. Whom you allowed to ravage my life — making no proper inquiries. Against whom you will not even bring an action for damages — for fear of taking my part. To-morrow we will go to Roscoff as we arranged and I will make myself agreeable to this scientific hack writer of yours — what is his name? Pox or Fox or something. Foxfield? How I shall yawn inside! My abominable child! One of these days you will drown me in your English dullness.’

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I read the note and after due consideration nodded to Marie. I wanted to see Foxfield. His copy was in arrears again.

So that was settled and this crisis was to end in the usual way.

I ordered some more brandy.

### § 14

How long are we to go on like this? How many people are there in the world, I wonder, who wake up in the morning to a situation they are convinced is intolerable, who say as I say, ‘This must end: I will stand it no longer’, and at night find themselves still in the same intolerable situation? There are times when I feel that all humanity lives in traps, gripped by obligations they have incurred, born caged from the first in the menagerie. Nowadays our developing psychological analysis stresses the rôle of the escape mechanisms in our minds – they should be called our pseudo-escape mechanisms. That kindly humour of mine is a case in point. In spite of it my life is being more and more conditioned by Dolores. Are we all of us jammed hopelessly in this drifting inertia? Is all life a drifting inertia, an endless band of flypaper? Are all the people about me full of suppressed vows to ‘do something’ – against the enslaving partner, the undetachable associate, the tangle of obligations – to families, to legal undertakings, to professions, feuds, routines, habits? . . .

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I resume the problem of the incompatibility between Dolores and myself. Where were we?

We had concluded that Dolores was a particularly simplified person, a far more completely isolated, logical and self-centred human being than the generality. She was so completely individualized, she was so much what every individual is and so little what every individual is not, that she lacked a distinctive individuality. That was our first finding. She was without a sort of variable, supplementary, hesitating undertow that operates in most human beings. Her stolon was broken. Her detachment was unqualified. She could not extend beyond her edges and boundaries. She could not forget herself. And since all individuals are, as individuals, doomed to defeat, since the outer world manifestly overrules and outlives them, her life has been necessarily a bitter struggle against the admission of her essential finality. She fights like a naughty child. She can concede nothing. She can allow nothing nor forgive anything. Someone else must do that.

The more normal mind is more complicated than hers; it is not so completely within the egotism. Quite a lot of it operates outside the drama of the triumph or frustration of the '*I*'. A large part of our self-education and our general training in conduct, is an adjustment between these outer non-egoistic motives and the desire for unqualified and triumphant self-assertion. Compared with Dolores, Mr. Stephen Wilbeck, we decided – was in certain unspecified ways different.

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We have implied that this difference lies in the fact that though he too is egotistical, he is not entirely made up of his own structural egotism. That is indeed his moral framework, but there is a lot of extra matter wrapped about it. We have now to get clear if we can about the nature of this extra matter.

A part of his being is evidently reservation and discretion – a deference. There is a sort of councillor, primarily devoted to his egotism, no doubt, but nevertheless functioning as a sort of family solicitor in his make-up, who says continually, ‘Do you think –?’ and ‘Must you go as far as that? Have you considered that there are others concerned in this?’ Possibly this something that was only present as a germ in the infant, but which has been developed by the conditions of his upbringing. It was there to train and so it has been trained. It has grown into a mitigating mental habit system that is now his second nature. His self-assertion has become so qualified that he now has a positive satisfaction in considering others and subordinating that primordial impulse to triumph over them, to their approval and acquiescence.

Part of these elaborations about his ego are no doubt ascribable to his happier upbringing. *His* triumph over them is that they do not know he triumphs over them. Dolores' childhood was spent amidst much more vehement circumstances; the atmosphere of her convent school was rank with a stimulated competitiveness. Learning in the type of school she attended was neither done under compulsion

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and punishment, after the ancient fashion, nor evoked through curiosity and the desire for performance in the modern style. It was a convent school in the Jesuit tradition, effort was stimulated by incessant displays, lists and changes of precedence, prize-givings, public and private praising, public humiliations, confessions and the like. She was trained to compete and be a winner, to take a pride simply in winning – a poisonous training for any child and the more successful it is the more pernicious are its effects. She got the full benefit of that.

Yet after making full allowance for this difference in our upbringing, I feel there is a broad margin of divergence still to be accounted for. We started intrinsically different. We did not start merely as different individuals, we started as different sorts of individuals. My interest in my egotism is not only less intense and more provisional by reason of my training, but also I have a sense of responsibility about scientific truth, about the truth of historical statement, about the general welfare of the community, about the beauties and decencies of town and country which she certainly does not feel. I do not mean that I have had these interests from the beginning, but they grew, just as my moustache grew, as my mind opened. I believe that the sort of person to which I belong has these natural impersonal solicitudes, just as I believe that her sort has not. But except for this belief of mine that there are such sorts, I find it very difficult to define them or associate them with any other characteristics. . . .

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### § 15

I sit here musing over types of human being. I muse now more than I write because the hour is late and my mind is losing intensity and becoming diffuse. . . .

We of the intelligentsia are always generalizing about humanity, simplifying its movements to explain them more easily, and dividing it in the most hap-hazard and uncritical way. What shallow hasty head-long minds we have, all of us! The best of us! What stuff our literature and in particular our history is! — up to now. I write this as a publisher. Some sort of classification of humanity seems necessary for many human activities, but much of what we have is more like the imaginations of vast, solemn, overgrown children, playing at thought as pompously as possible, than active adult minds thinking. ‘History,’ said Henry Ford, meaning all written history, ‘is bunk.’ What intuitions that man has had! How completely I agree with him!

History! What rows of lopsided books come to mind — from that poor old gossiping propagandist Herodotus to the distorting patchworks of to-day! When shall we have a real spring-cleaning of the warehouses of history? When will the biologists and archaeologists go in to that vast accumulation with their mops and pails? I mean no public book-burning of course, but I can imagine that vast quantities of

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the books we hold in respect at present will be left at last to oxidize quietly in our attics. Swarms of erudite, uneducated, incontinent little chaps go on and on, conceiving and writing these copious, misshapen books, pretentious histories, in which ‘the Orient’ is contrasted with ‘the West’, ‘North’ with ‘South’, Aryan with non-Aryan, in which the Spirit of Civilization, never defined, marches West (or East, it doesn’t matter), in which it has a Cradle, in which the spread of Christianity is made accountable for the downfall of Rome, or for the discovery of America, and Buddhism for an alleged military inefficiency in the Chinese. Capitalism becomes a ‘System’ organized in a malignant spirit by the Puritans, whom nobody loves. And the amazing ‘movements’ these historians invent! the incredible ‘races!’ . . .

Most alleged ethnological classifications have idiot faces – not so much faces indeed as dead incredible masks clamped upon – upon sacks filled with ‘all sorts’. These historians talk glibly of a Jewish ‘race’, of Nordics, Alpines, Mediterraneans. They would make a botanical species of a macedoine of fruit. They do not seem to care, and nobody seems to care, how wildly they classify and distinguish and oppose. And of cultures! Hardly one of these exponents of how humanity works, but professes an exquisite power of judgment. That unparalleled ‘Greek Culture’! Somehow they do believe in it. They all believe in it. Have you ever asked yourself what it really amounted to? With its omnipresent Corinthian capitals, its crudely

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painted buildings, its pink statues of women, its everlasting booming Homer, its city bosses and its hysterical heroes, all rhetoric and tears! And the undefined 'golden ages' of these historians; their equally undefined 'ages of decadence'? Anything seems acceptable that is even faintly plausible, and off they go.

Yet we endure these Spenglers and Toynbees and Paretos and their like and even partly read them. We endure them. We *have* to endure them. At the worst they are experimentalists in statement – though they all refuse to listen to each other, much less to collate themselves with each other and so oblige us by cancelling each other out. They multiply and proliferate; they clog our bookshelves, they beleaguer our minds. Their fungoid abundance of assertion renders any clear conception of the recent human past impossible. We live with our minds overgrown by an entirely unpruned jungle of historical misrepresentation. . . .

We make real efforts to read these books. We *do* not believe in them but we read them and talk about them. At the backs of our minds we feel that there *are* distinctions, real and profoundly important distinctions, between different kinds of human beings, and that beneath the confused surfaces of history there are real processes that still elude our definition. Our endurance of these historical and sociological proliferations is the mark of our helplessness. We feel, I suppose, that maybe it is better that these interpreters, rather than not write at all, should flounder along with these guesses and prejudices of theirs. On approval. Only

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there is no approval, unhappily. None of them, as I say, ever seems to notice and criticize the others. Each galumphs about, bruising the sward of fact, according to his fancy. There I think we have real grounds of complaint. We are left an impossible task. It is like the problem of our lunatic asylums; we have to find better men to put aimless enterprise within bounds. Before you can effectively explode your Pareto, for example, and dismiss him, you have to find a first-rate psycho-analyst sufficiently industrious to read, anatomize and find out all about him.

As a publisher with a conscience, as a caterer for thought, I sit in my office in a sort of despair, contemplating the stuff going down the chute upon the heads of my poor public below. The historical books I issue – reluctantly but I do issue them – contemporary history and general history – as well as a lot of base but profitable twaddle about Empresses, Napoleon, Dictators and so on – are worse even than the endless impossible theorizings of the economists. Those are bad enough. I have some of them, too, on my lists, alas! But *their* books are just vapourings, they wash like wavelets about rocks of concrete reality and do not greatly affect them. While the booms and slumps go on about them, they write as the birds sing, mere starlings they are and shrill canaries, but the histories on the other hand have animus, their misconceptions are mischievous, they are poisonous, they enter into life, they partake of the stuff of life, they disorganize any collective political will, they spread

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into minds and push them askew and distort and ultimately destroy them.

Sometimes Dolores turns her mind to discussing world affairs. She talks this history stuff by instinct. She talks as though I had never published a book. I feel like a man who makes a clearing and as fast as he makes it the jungle flows back. She lays down the law, she generalizes about 'France' and 'England' and 'America'. She really thinks there is a large collective insultable lady called 'America'. She scolds 'Germany', we did not punish 'Germany' enough, she reproaches 'Russia'. She abandons nations to their fate. Never will she speak to Germany again. Germany must stand in the corner, face to wall, and Britain must wear a dunce's cap. It is the most awful gabble – but it is nothing more than the inevitable end of this mud-chute called 'history'. It comes to her *via* the Parisian papers and sub-diplomatic chatter at third hand.

The balanced stuff I hunt out and get written and issue she never looks at. It irritates her. You can't easily take sides. It perplexes her. It does not fall into her patterns, the common established patterns of history. She cannot read it. She wants to be rude to it and dismiss it from existence. She waves her hands about. She raises her voice. 'Je trouve,' she says. 'Je trouve,' pushing away the indigestible ideas. I have to get away from her or she would unhinge me. When I hear her voice fluting along about these things I begin to doubt whether the reconstruction of men's minds and methods to meet our new needs is

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not a fantastic dream. For in her fashion I know millions, so to speak, think.

I wish I knew how to help remedy this confused acquiescence of the general mind. I wish I knew how to brace up the phagocytes of criticism.

People must have a history of some sort and an ethnology of some sort before they can exist politically. And what can be expected of minds full of this drivel of hate and vain comparisons?

Much has been done in the past decade or so to reduce flabby stomachs. Might we not begin a movement presently, to brace up flabby history? What is *my* firm doing in this matter? What might it do? What am I doing? I ought to be finding young men and women of mental energy to start an Augean critique, a True History School. Why am I fretting about here in Torquéstol tied to a fractious uncontrollable woman while I ought to be in England getting on with my job?

### § 16

I think this, I write this, and yet I sit here and my mind drifts back to its prepossession with Dolores, and for the life of me I cannot resist the allurement of these very vulgarities of history I have been denouncing. Suddenly I find my head busy with them, adventitious analogies, wild generalizations, unjustifiable assertions, fragmentary facts.

For example, is Dolores, I ask, contrasted with me

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and antagonized to me by some difference of *race*? And ignoring her Scotch father I find myself inclined to call her 'Oriental', insist on the predominance of her Armenian genes and find analogies for her conduct in the known and alleged qualities of these acquisitive marketing people from the Near East. Who remember so precisely and abundantly and think so meanly. I admit – I have no grounds for the hypothesis – a considerable streak of something which I call in a pejorative sense 'Jewish' in her make-up. I mean nothing racial in that, I mean something simply and blankly prejudicial. I use these terms as loosely as anyone does, yet under this loose, unjustifiable terminology, I can almost persuade myself that I am groping towards a perceptible reality.

But if I drop this racial idea, I am still confronted by these immense differences in character one finds between man and man. And now I warn you, dear, but I feel slightly recalcitrant reader that I have lugged thus far, now I am really going to theorize.

Under the cloak of the apparent races of men, under the thin and superficial disguise of colour differences and varieties of hair, height and chest measurement, I believe that, interbreeding together and all mixed up together, there are certain real human races, hereditary strains, that do not readily lose their identity. I do not think I have been clear in this belief hitherto, but now I see it as if it had been in my mind for a long time indistinctly. It has been assembled there by Foxfield and a miscellany of

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biological reading, and now it breaks out. There are breeds, I find, adapted to a spacious and generalized modern life, new variations perhaps, other breeds essentially parasitic, others timidly docile, and again breeds bitterly ego-centred and malignantly resistant to adaptation. (Dolores e.g.) These breeds traverse all recognized boundaries. It is as plain as daylight to me now.

So far very little has been done to separate these real breeds out. Particularly have we failed to distinguish the new types that are undoubtedly appearing. We have missed the ingredients of the mixture and especially the new ingredients, because we have been thinking in terms of groups in any one of which these new factors may appear. The uncritical distribution of men into races, cultures and peoples has masked the reality. Max Nordau and Lombroso indeed made some efforts to distinguish 'criminal' and degenerate types, but they lacked critical acumen, they were journalists essentially, and they assumed a quite unjustifiable authoritativeness in their speculations. The social Linnaeus has still to come (and Bradfield, Clews and Wilbeck are looking for him). The classification of main human types and temperaments from Hippocrates' down to the *cerebrotonics*, *somatotonics* and *viscerotonics* of to-day – lovely 'scientific' words these and most impressive for the young – has always been a fair field for this sort of intellectual larking, and I do not see why I should not have my fling in it. Larking it is. Are these types, are they breeds and strains, are

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they genetic, that is to say, or are they just classes by circumstance and for convenience in argument, like the 'proletarians' and 'bourgeoisie' so remarkably imagined by the Communist rabbis?

I propose to accept the former alternative and assert that this mankind, this race of men, like the race of dogs, is a great mix-up of interbreeding species with a tendency to what Foxfield calls 'genetic re-emergence' – genes of a feather flock together – and also in a state of – what is his phrase? – 'variational initiative'.

I do not see why I should accept any of these other fellows' classifications. I do not like any of them. Thought is free. '*Cerebrotonic*' makes me think somehow of Aldous Huxley with neuralgia, faint but pursuing the ideal. I set about the matter in my own distinctive fashion. To begin with I abolish the species *Homo sapiens*. I propose to replace that by a number of species and varieties, new and old. *Homo*, I declare, is a genus with an immense range of species, sub-species, hybrids and mutations. For to-night anyhow. I am going to collect my own specimens like any other honest naturalist. First *Homo Doloresiform*, a widespread, familiar type, emphatic, impulsive and implacable. Particularly *implacable*. Then *Homo Wilbeckius*, probably a recent mutation, observant, inhibited and disingenuous. Many of those new cerebrotonics may belong to this species. Its chief distinction is that it is flexible. Other species there are but this will be enough to start with. Later no doubt

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dozens of other species, variants, stabilized hybrids, will become distinguishable. But for the moment let us take the two main sub-genera of *Homo*, *Homo regardant* and *Homo rampant*, the former traditional, legal and implacable and the latter open-minded and futuristic, making Doloresiform the type-species of the former group and Wilbeckius of the latter.

The Dolores type has naturally imposed itself upon my attention. If I am really to be regarded as typically human, then according to my new theory Dolores is not human, she is a human-looking animal of a kind capable of interbreeding with human beings. *Or vice versa.*

Here in the small hours I find the Dolores traits very evident in history, and as the thin mists of on-coming slumber creep across my slightly intoxicated brain I become more and more like one of these contemporary historians of ours spinning his web. Curious identifications become possible, I associate the traits of Dolores with the warp and woof of history, I become myself a highly intellectual, highly moral, blondish 'modern' type, and she becomes all the acquisitive, objectionable brunet peoples in history, the peoples who insist, the peoples who resist, the 'inadaptables' of today who created our yesterdays.

There are, I reflect, Dolores nations, races and peoples. Always a Dolores people is a tenacious, self-righteous people with an exaggerated past and great claims. Its gods are always jealous gods and it takes after them. The patriotism of such a people is a sacred

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national egotism. What it cannot do through its individuals it does all together, and usually at the top of its voice. It will not come into any sort of general consortium with the rest of mankind. It must be and remain itself. It grabs every advantage in its right, and since that is the way to get your knuckles rapped, they do get rapped. Then its vindictiveness is relatively enormous. It never forgets a grievance. It lives on grievances. . . .

The time relationship of a Dolores people is quite different from that of my sort. Its idea of the future is not, as mine is, a magnificent progressive achievement continually opening out, forgiving everyone, comprehending everyone, but a judgment day, a day of bitter reckoning. . . .

Usury came to the minds of the Dolores peoples, naturally enough, as a quite lovely idea, as a perpetually increasing right to dominate and dun. I think a racial nexus of Dolores people must have provided the prevalent type all over the world of early history. They invented finance, and we live in a financial world. It is, I am convinced, unnecessary, but we do. We still live under the tradition of extinguishable debts and everlasting claims. Their life is deduction *ad infinitum*. Come what may, never shall the wrongs and claims of Doloresland, never shall brave little Doloresland, the remnants of the various Dolores people, perish from the earth. For evermore these nations shall sit at their game and lose and win and squabble. . . . The old world was truly

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theirs, they made it and they fit it, and they struggle unrelentingly against the advent of a new.

Dolores' thin, painted, eager face pervades this nocturnal vision of history. (I am possibly writing in my sleep. Perhaps that is how those other fellows get their stuff done. It explains the wild facility of their generalizations. . . . And also I fancy I am a little drunk. It is queer — but I have been drinking brandy rather freely since I came to Torquéstol.) She expands after the fashion of dreams to become all the obdurate, grievance-cherishing, triumph-seeking people in the world. She becomes everything that stands in the way of a World Pax and a universal system of mutual service. I see her down the corridors of time, the unyielding guardian of her own ways, refusing to adapt, refusing to tolerate, confronting her enemies, pursuing her malice, unable to forget her old world, unable to learn a new one. . . .

All the great religions, all the prophets, every undogmatic teacher becomes in this picture, the voice of the new *Homo* trying to emerge.

But this is really an easy game! Why am I merely a publisher? I have an unwonted feeling to-night that I can *write*. Is this I am discovering here a bit more arbitrary than Spenglerism? Is it any more pretentious than the social philosophy of that force-loving little Bayard of twisted history, Pareto? To-night at any rate I am full of my own interpretations. Why should not every one of us have his own? You start up your theories and analogies, you hoot like a historian and

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the facts, the slightly limping facts and the striding assumptions, come crowding along like people storming a river steamer. The current is dragging at my mental keel. I heave and bump back against the quay. The ideas begin to take their places.

More dreamlike than ever, I seem to be on something like a ship's bridge, and all that crowd of ideas are dropping into fresh positions under my command. And there are new ideas too, mixed up with age-old prejudices, there are novel biological terms and living generalizations – ‘revolutions in the fundamental conditions of human life’ – ‘adaptation to a new synthesis’ – ‘inadaptable types and adaptable types’ – obstinate traditionists versus flexible moderns – shut and narrow against open and wide. All sorts of ideas that have been bandied about between myself and Foxfield come up from the bottom of my mind like fermenting scum. *Man, like the dog, is a mixture of species;* that is idea enough to fit out a dozen Spenglers. (Those two splashes you heard were ‘Orient’ and ‘Occident’ being put overboard.) *The Way of the World Series* seems to be painted large upon my vessel’s side. We fly the flag of Science and social anticipation, above the flag of History. I thought my boat was just a launch, but I find it is a liner. A captured liner. . . .

A new way of living – from politics to personal relations. . . . Dolores versus Stephen. . . . Adaptation to new conditions that have changed fundamentally. . . .

Where am I? How far have I got afloat without realizing I have embarked upon a vast theory of my own?

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I seem to be back in my bedroom at Torquéstol, and the writing before me has become a wild scrawl. I *have* been writing in my sleep. . . .

Some of the stuff is quite illegible.

We must consider this to-morrow. . . .

And now, I suppose, since I do not want our real war to break out just yet, I must go along the passage and say 'Good-night' to her.

### § 17

(*Torquéstol, August 31st, 1934*)

I have left this diary untouched for some days. We went to Roscoff to see the great fig tree and the Marine Laboratory. Dolores dressed as though she was going to tea in the Place Vendôme – what do they call the place? All alive with new hats it is. I forget. We met Foxfield at Roscoff as I had appointed.

At first Dolores was disposed to treat Foxfield – since she knew that occasionally I paid him money – with considerable condescension. He did not appear to observe that. She also addressed several almost audible asides to me. 'Why do you let him come so untidy? It is a slight on both of us. Does he *never* cut that hair?' These also, if they were heard, went unheeded. After one glance at her, he paid her no more attention, until we were among the salt-water tanks, to which he led us with a sort of round-shouldered

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determination. Then suddenly addressing himself to her, he began a lucid and detailed account of the love-life of the octopus.

'I find it the most hideous of created things,' she had said.

'But consider its sensitiveness,' he remonstrated, becoming extraordinarily like an octopus himself as he said it, and then, with a touch of wonder, 'See! It is *looking* at you.'

Dolores became interested. 'Mind you – they don't often take notice of things outside the glass,' Foxfield said very gravely, and regarded her with a speculative eye, as though he sought some reason for it.

Dolores made an elegant gesture at the uncoiling creature in the corner. 'C'est un monstre,' she said relenting, noted a sort of invitation in an extending arm, and was reluctant to turn away.

'But in those unfolding undulating movements – a certain grace?'

'A certain grace,' she admitted. 'Yes.'

'Sophisticated perhaps. But could a man do that? See! *There!*'

'M'm'm,' she considered.

'Few people realize the capacity for passion among marine animals,' Foxfield went on in that ample, soft, slightly piggish voice of his, and it dawned upon me that in his own peculiar way he meant to get even with her for that preliminary phase of patronage. 'Mind you – floating in the sea as they do – undistracted by gravitation . . .'

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This was a new idea to Dolores.

'Like painted Gods upon a ceiling,' said Foxfield.

'Naturally,' she agreed, reflected, and then pursued knowledge. 'But in water - do they make love? Can they?'

'Incessantly. For example . . .'

It was a new view of an aquarium to Dolores that it could be an arena of passion.

'For example - ?' she echoed.

Foxfield hesitated for a moment and sought my eye. His large loose mouth was interrogative. But he found nothing in my eye to restrain him, and with a sort of modest reluctance, speaking very gently, he proceeded to instruct Dolores in the hidden ways of nature. I had never realized before how much livelier an imagination he has than Creation, and what a brighter world we should have had if affairs had been in the hands of this trained biologist.

'Of course,' he said with an apologetic sigh, 'the sea here gets a lot of warm water from the gulf stream -- a lot of *warm* water. Even the vegetables in this part of Brittany are - ' he sank his voice - '*precocious*.'

'Yes?' said Dolores.

'Even the early flowers. When English bulbs are still in the nursery. And there is a great fig tree - but you will see that for yourself . . . But consider these dogfish. Now *they* . . .'

I see no reason for recording the coarse selachian scandals he retailed to her.

Dolores was so artlessly interested that she forgot

## DOLORES AT TORQUÉSTOL

to be the ultra-fashionable lady altogether. She became the last and brightest and indeed slightly gaminesque pupil of a great savant, who told her things, wonderful things, that he had never been able to unfold before to so quick and intelligent a mind.

He talked and talked, gravely but unedifyingly, and grew more and more solemnly happy as he talked.

She was much excited by the idea of sea water as something into which an infinitude of spawn and gonads were perpetually liberated, as Foxfield explained, ‘without the slightest precautions’, and the more she pursued this subject the more disordered his hair became, the more wicked his great spectacle-magnified eyes, and the more gravely preposterous his slowly enunciated biological exaggerations. The life of the ocean became an orgy tempered by massacre. ‘But they hardly notice they are eaten,’ he said.

I had never seen Dolores in such eager pursuit of knowledge, and when Foxfield appealed to me to confirm his statement that Tritons and Mermaids were ‘conceivable – in actual practice I mean – conceivable’ – I did so, like one who betrays the arcana.

‘Of course they hush it up,’ said Foxfield very confidentially.

‘And now, Steenie,’ she said, ‘you see how sound my instinct was!'

‘?!’ said Foxfield by means of a suitable noise.

‘Against bathing in the sea.’

‘There was a young lady of Sark,’ began Foxfield, and then turned away and blew his nose violently.

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His feelings were suddenly too much for him. Over his handkerchief he watched his effect upon me. Was he going too far? I looked judicious. My eye counselled moderation. For a time he desisted from the topic of the salt salacious sea. I doubt if anything further is known about the young lady of Sark. It becomes just one more Mystery of the Sea.

That trip to Roscoff was indeed an unexpected success. Dolores explained to Foxfield how superior the marine laboratories there were to the marine biological station at Plymouth – which she heard of for the first time – and how inferior the British scientific mind was to the clear logic of the Latins. ‘You dream,’ she said, ‘you dream. Your women do not wake you up and inspire you. Look at Steenie? What would he be if he never came to France?’

‘Ah!’ said Foxfield and looked at me accusingly with magnified eyes.

And when we contemplated the great fig tree in the Enclos des Capucins, she made us both jump and look round guiltily for nuns, for their flavour still lingers in the place, by her remark, coming clear and abrupt out of a pensive stillness, ‘Regard it, Steenie. A chic costumier could not have invented a better leaf. It almost makes one believe in what you call Papa Bible, all over again.’

It was one of her brilliant days. She came near to being happy – and I liked her.

She approved vociferously of the restaurant upon the plage, its cleanliness, its unaffected simplicity and

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the fishiness of its fish; she toyed with the idea of installing Breton servants in the flat; she told the proprietor that she was an Egyptian princess in her own right, and that Foxfield and I were producing a book about Brittany in which he would certainly figure very honourably; and later in the town she went some way towards the purchase of a large salt-water tank which could be installed in the flat for the closer supervision of marine morality. But the price and cost of transport, she decided, was prohibitive.

And so home, leaving Foxfield chuckling heavily as we receded — he had begun a sort of chuckle soliloquy to himself after lunch — and obviously puzzled that I should ever have betrayed discontent with my married lot.

In the car Dolores relapsed towards fatigue and intimations of her pain, but revived abruptly to express her amazement at the fullness of a sea anemone's life as Foxfield had expounded it. 'I thought they were mere pretty dolls,' she said.

Also she remarked: 'You publishers underpay men like Foxfield. What are his opportunities? None! He is like the great Curie. Who worked all his life in a shed. . . . Afterwards they were sorry.'

'Did you talk to him about that?'

'He wouldn't talk. He is too loyal to you. But I could see through him.'

Then in a rapt voice: 'The things he knows! The things he might still discover! He makes Nature *live*. He goes to the core of things. How dull your talk is in

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comparison, Steenie; how banal! How English! Never have you told me anything of all this. If I were a rich woman I would endow him. Like Rousseau. Like Catherine the Great and Voltaire.'

'Damn!' I said suddenly.

'What?'

'Nothing. Only that I went to Roscoff just to get Foxfield to hurry up with his copy – and from first to last I never said a word about it.'

### § 18

(*Torquéstol, September 1st, 1934*)

I have just had an absurd little conversation in the smoking-room with one of the two English fishermen. They are English, I find – not Irish. His friend vanished some three or four days ago. The derelict was sitting in a corner with his mouth pulled down at one corner by his pipe, staring at nothing. I felt his loneliness. I had to speak to him.

'Your friend has left you?' I remarked.

He answered resentfully. 'Gone off to his wife', he said. 'And the fishing was perfect!'

'Is his wife ill?'

'Not a bit – not a *bit* of it.'

'Married long?'

'Ages. She's just making trouble. Couldn't leave him in peace. Had to start something.'

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I perceived he was something of a misogynist and his next remark confirmed this assumption.

'Marriage,' he said, 'is a terrible tie. A *terrible* tie.'

He paused there.

'You're not married?' I asked.

'I have been,' he said, vouchsafing no particulars. 'I know about it.'

I felt it was for him to go on or break off as it pleased him. I said no more.

He smoked moodily.

'It's curious the way that fellow hangs on to that woman. As a wife —. I know her.'

In that case I felt the word was with him.

'Restless,' he said. 'In — cessant.'

'This time it's a row over a bridge club — *libel*. . . .

'Somebody said she cheated or she said somebody cheated or *she* cheated. Most of them do, seems to me, say it or do it. They aren't happy until the hand's been played and the jawbation begins. Anyhow it got put down in black and white. And here's this poor chap. . . . Middle-aged. . . . Nice quiet friendly chap. Got to go right back in the middle of his vacation. What to? Crowds of women, all dressed up, all talking at once. Stand up for his wife's torts and all that. Quarrel with his own friends. They'll drag their husbands in, willy nilly. . . .

'And the fishing — *perfect*.'

After an interval: 'Just lack of employment. Surplus ginger.'

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'But why has she never occupied herself with something more substantial? County council work? Women can be good administrators. Some sort of study?'

'They won't. You know that as well as I do. It's bridge and chatter, chatter and bridge – or that blasted backgammon.'

He seemed particularly hostile to backgammon.

I admitted the general justice of his indictment so far as middling-well-off women were concerned.

'They do seem at a loss to find something to do,' I said. 'I'm puzzled at times. In Paris, it is the same. *Why* this bridge, *why* this afternoon gadding about?'

'The afternoon's the devil,' he said. 'They ought all to be locked in from two to seven. All of 'em. Save No End of trouble.'

For a time he smoked in silence, looking ineffably wise and emitting puffs of smoke like an Indian fire blanket signal. Then he asked me: 'Have you ever seen a woman fishing?'

I digested this for a time. 'It's a very profound and extraordinary thought,' I said, 'but I never have. Of course on the Seine, you see Monsieur Dupont and his wife in a punt – yes. But she – she is either knitting or reading a novel or fussing with the lunch. It's true. They don't fish. They never fish. I have never seen a woman by herself with a rod and line – never.'

'And you never will,' he said conclusively and began very slowly to knock out his pipe on the palm of his hand.

'That's women,' he said, nodded, and left it at that.

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### § 19

So far the lonesome fisherman. Manifestly there was a personal element in his views. But how far is his sort of hatred of women, his tone of middle-aged disillusionment, general among men of his age nowadays? My range of observation is limited, but I am inclined to think that under contemporary conditions many a middle-aged gentleman who would once have been a great proudly-booming paterfamilias with a subservient wife, at least an outwardly subservient wife, and downtrodden sons and daughters and grandchildren galore, is now in a resentful unproductive partnership that becomes less and less refreshing and more and more unmeaning as the years slip by. Marriage as it used to be involved the incalculable adventure of children and household; it was a comprehensive life experience. Now the world is full of dissatisfied couples with disconnected instincts, wanting everything in general and nothing in particular.

We mammals seem to have been evolved for the wear and tear of breeding, the cares of parentage, and then physical exhaustion and death. Our teeth are timed for that. Faced with a contraction of a common objective, we human beings find ourselves in need of still imperfectly understood adaptations, and for the want of them the mutual exasperation of men and women increases.

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His misogyny has for a moment set me inquiring in a new direction. How far is the antagonism of Dolores and myself a special case of the contemporary sex war? Her inborn childlessness merely accentuates that natural chafing. Perhaps women, because they present the ampler aspects of reproduction, find adaptation to current evasions and renunciations more difficult than men. They have not the same escape mechanisms as the more experimental male. They are less capable of that rapt withdrawal from the personal urgencies of life which is typified by fishing. They cannot abstract themselves with the same ease. I for example become more and more obsessed by the idea of an educational and exploratory rôle in life. It has grown into a reasonably consistent philosophy of service and contribution to broad human ends in which I lose my egotistical prepossessions more and more. It does not distress me – so far as I am able to detect what is happening within myself – that I have no real household. Our home in Paris is a lodging, which is the least part of a household.

But I do feel a need of companionship. That is deeper in my make-up. The common interest of a household did make a mutual companionship possible under the old conditions. I want someone to laugh with, one or more congenials, with whom I can air my opinions freely, people to whom at a pitch one could turn for intimate help, and I have no intimacy of that sort at all. Dolores is near to me, as France and Germany are near to one another, with an armed

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frontier between us. Whatever I say to her is public property. And sooner or later it is turned to my hurt. I cannot relax my egotism to her or anyone, and she does not want any relaxation of egotism. Which probably explains why I am writing this diary-biography.

But because the lives of women are more thrown back upon themselves by the social dissolution of the household and more attenuated by that deprivation than the lives of men, because that household dissolution is exposing men and women to each other too barely, turning the natural differences between them into plain discords, it does not follow that the antagonism of Dolores and myself is merely a special instance of that. Our essential antagonism is implemented by that most stupid of all social institutions, the practically indissoluble childless marriage, so that I am unable to get away from her, but that merely puts a cutting edge upon a difference much more profound than the existing stresses between married people. So far as mere sex goes there is no trouble between us, except that I have to go so much away from her to attend to my essential business. I do not find any echo of Tolstoy's *Kreutzer Sonata* in our relations. Phases of gusto and disgust do not occur. His, I suspect, was a melancholic ego-centred temperament lacking in cheerful elasticity. I do not think that at the root of it mine is a man-and-woman story at all. It is a story about two different sorts of people. If Dolores was a man, racially and culturally different from me, to

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whom I was bound by contracts into a close and complicated business relationship, so that for example I was senior partner while he was irremovable, the intensity of the conflict might be less but the shape of it would be closely similar than the one between Dolores and myself. He would baffle and entangle me in much the same way as she does and I should have the same sort of impotent exasperation.

So I find my way back to my deepening conviction that Dolores and I are not really female and male of the same kind, but creatures of a different kind, for whom any mutuality of understanding is for ever impossible. There are, I am convinced, by virtue of my own theory, Wilbeck women in the world and – temperamental actors, for example – Dolores men.

I have been reading over the stuff I wrote the other night about the human mélange. I was muzzy-minded with brandy and fatigue when I wrote it and yet I find I am still in agreement with it. I think I shall leave it just as I wrote it. I thought I was writing burlesque but if the manner is burlesque the matter is not. My excursion into slightly alcoholic dream theories may have been not so much a lapse as – what shall I call it? – a discovery by relaxation. Discoveries through relaxation of the attention, do certainly occur, under hypnotism for example, or when one works out a problem by sleeping on it. When I thought I was burlesquing those big socio-historical books I was really adopting a method which allowed an accumulation of ideas below the surface of

## DOLORES AT TORQUESTOL

consciousness to come to the top in a very convenient manner. This theory that a number of species interlace in human genetics – parallel to the multiple species mixed up in the dog world – is just not implausible enough to be dismissed out of hand. It draws together a miscellany of notions that have grown out of my talks with Foxfield and my general biological reading.

I and Dolores are different in kind, just as the Neanderthaler was different from the Cro-Magnard. They too may have been able to interbreed. . . .

### § 20

I paused in my writing. A moment ago I was scribbling calmly. Then I became aware that something had happened to my desk, something was missing.

My photograph of Lettice had gone. I found the torn fragments in my waste-paper basket.

Manifestly Dolores had come to my room in my absence – pursuing some curiosity of her own. Perhaps she wanted to know why I spend so much time up here. I keep this manuscript locked up in my dispatch case by habit, but there may have been a letter or so lying about, and there was this photograph. It had stood against a silly little brass ash jar. Lettice sent it me three or four days ago. . . .

But this is final. I must have a word with Dolores and I must have it now.

## CHAPTER V

### THRENODY

(*Torquéstol, September 2nd, 1934*)

#### § 1

I CANNOT go on with the *Case of Stephen Wilbeck contra Dolores*, and I cannot for a very good reason. It has become unnecessary. Dolores is dead.

This poor being of vanity and crazy spites is dead.  
And I am free.

I left her long after midnight. I went to her room after I had found that torn-up photograph. I scribbled the last word of the previous section – ‘now’. Then for a time I sat with the scraps of Lettice before me, one wide-open eye in one bit and a third of the face in another, and the mouth with one corner missing still faintly smiling.

‘This must stop,’ said I. ‘This sort of thing must stop.’ And I had the fullest realization of my impotence as I said it.

What could I do? Thrash her? She would brag about it for ever. It would be a new tie. But what else was there to do? What good would it be to splutter fresh protests against her invincible flow of words?

I got up and went with the torn fragments crumpled in my hand, to her room.

## THRENODY

She was awake and waiting for me.

'Look at that!' I said, and opened my hand to show her what I was holding.

'Yes,' she answered defiantly. 'Look at that.'

'I won't have it.'

'I won't have it. I won't have that chit of a girl put in my place. No! Stuck up on your desk there for everyone to see!'

'She is my daughter.'

'She is your mistress.'

'Dolores, are you mad? Why do you invent this crazy story? What do you mean by it? What drives you?'

'Then why do you make a display of her? Why do you want her with you? Why do you want to turn me out of my own apartment – the home I have made, for – for her?'

'You know this is a fantastic invention.'

'I know it is the fantastic truth. Why do you do such things to me, Steenie? Why are you so hateful to me? You keep me in a home you desert. You run about the world.'

'Nonsense,' said I, 'you know I *have* to run about the world. You have all you need. You have just the ménage you want, car to your taste, servants to dismiss, all your gossips. You dress – brilliantly. You lead an animated life. You tell everything to everybody in the most brilliant and authoritative manner possible. All your friends admire you. You admit that yourself. People turn to look at you in the street. You know

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as well as I do that Lettice is not with me over there. I see her hardly at all – not once a month. She's at her college and she goes home to Southampton. You know in your heart you are trumping up this story out of nothing. *Why? Why do you do it?*"

She had listened to what I had to say with unusual patience. She was sitting up now in her bed with her lean arms clasped about her knees, brooding over her wrongs. I perceived more clearly than I had ever done before that her lean and once rather fine face began to show the wear and tear of much painting and that the lines about her discontented mouth were deepening.

'I hate you,' she said.

'I love you and I hate you,' she amplified. '*Why – I don't know. But you – . Have you ever loved me? Never. I am not blind. You have pretended. Used me. If you did not love me, why did you take me? I gave myself to you so recklessly, so freely. . . .*'

I said nothing. I was trying to recall the precise details of that surrender while she improvised her story of her life.

'You took me – as a stupid child grasps a beautiful toy. You took me and broke me. Before I met you I was already celebrated. Yes, celebrated – deny it though you may. My animation was a matter of general remark. My abilities. I could write, I could talk until the whole table was listening to me. Until everyone else shut up in despair. Everyone talked of what I might do next. It seemed I might recite –

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make conferences. A princess. From the land of Cleopatra. None of your dowdy British royalty about that! A woman who could dress with infinite chic. And at the same time a woman of importance in art, in literature. I had lovers – who loved me. *They* really loved me, Steenie. Nothing was too good for me. My lightest fancy was *law*. All life was before me. If you had supported me, even here in Paris I could have created a salon. In spite of you. I might have influenced statesmen. I might have swayed a dictator. And then – infatuation for you! A caprice yes, to begin with, but then infatuation. It is like that play of Shakespeare's. Yes. You Bottom! You great Bottom! Bully Bottom. Squatting on me. Insensitive. What could I do with you? Too stupid even to *see* the woman you embraced. With a sneer for all that I said and all that I was. You have eaten up my youth. You have wasted my life.'

I remained perfectly still with the torn up photograph gripped in my hand in my pocket.

'Heavy you are – lout you are. Illiterate in spite of the books you sell. In spite of the poor authors you cajole and rob. That poor Foxfield for example – shabby, uncomplaining. It is not merely that you are incredibly clumsy and stupid with me. That, I suppose, one must expect from an Englishman and a tradesman at that. In a way, at first, that amused. It was – sauce piquante. I liked it – once. Yes. But there is something *evil* in you, something perverse. Gradually, step by step, I am coming to see you as you

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are. You have none of my delicacy. Never did you have a touch of it. This coarse sensualist with a streak of cruelty blunders his way through all my illusions. How coarse your face has become recently. Even you – in your glass – ought to see it. More and more you are yourself. I hear things. I learn things. I find out things. Never mind how. I know. Oh yes, Steenie, I know. You have always been an open book to me and now you are transparent – perfectly transparent.

‘But, you said it first, Steenie – this sort of thing must stop. I’ve been thinking things out – while you have been louting about up there in your room – writing on the sly to all your mistresses in England. Oh yes – I know. But I have the logical mind of a Latin, a Latin sense of reality, and I have my life to consider. . . .’

(Last night she was saying that.)

‘I have my life to consider. My infatuation for you is at an end. Fini! Never more will I consider your wishes, your plans, your well-being. No more housekeeping for your sake. No more conflicts with servants in order that you should live in cotton-wool. That long dream of servitude is past. I cast it aside. I mean to take care of my own life – from this time forth. Dolores for Dolores. Clear-headed and resolute as I am by nature, and now *absolutely* selfish, a woman robbed of all illusions. Your work, Steenie. And now I mean to resume my own career – as your wife, Steenie, your lawful wedded wife – a hard and brilliant

## THRENODY

woman. You have suppressed me, kept me out of the limelight long enough. I have thought it all out. Every detail. I shall come to London to that flat of yours and put things in order there – according to *my* ideas. I'll send your flabby, slovenly, English servants spinning. I'll teach your English mistresses and “darlings” a little straightforward morality. Society women looking down their noses at a woman too brilliant for them. I'll talk to them. “Madame”, I shall say when they telephone to you. “This is no longer a secret flat. Madame Wilbeck is at home to callers”. I will give a great cocktail for all of them. Let them turn up their snub noses at me then if they can.

‘No! Don't interrupt me, Steenie. I shall only raise my voice – and then perhaps I shall be sick. I am telling you calmly what I mean to do. Let me keep calm. It is no good your protesting and upsetting me. What I tell you I am going to do, I shall do.’

But I was not interrupting her. I was thinking about her intensely, for never had she expounded herself and her impulses so completely before. I was standing by her bedside as she monologued, watching her thin flushed profile. It was plainly a premeditated piece she was repeating. She had been piecing it together for some time. It was her version of our relationship. I had seen it growing in her mind. It was her rationalization of all her moods and impulses. And as I marked its hard fantastic unreality, I found myself wondering how far on the other side of veracity my own version might lie. Not so far as this surely.

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She went on with her declaration of intentions. She sustained an appearance of implacable determinations. But she was speaking reverie – indulging the chosen dream of her heart, the pose she liked best. She was not, I knew, going to do all of this, but I knew that she might attempt enough of it to become intolerably troublesome.

‘Yes, Steenie,’ she was saying, holding up a long, thin, crimson-nailed index finger; ‘you are dealing now with an entirely disillusioned woman. I shall be unrelenting. Unrelenting. I shall use every one of my rights against you. You are my husband. Thank you for that, but do not think I will not use to the utmost the rights it gives me. Anything you have ever given me, anything you have ever conceded me, I shall use against you now. I shall come to London, publicly and conspicuously. I do not care how rough the crossing is. I can endure it. It is three years now and six months since I was last in England. I will go everywhere with you. I shall have it announced in *The Times* – “after a long stay abroad”. I shall incur debts for you for all necessary expenditure. I shall see to it that you are properly watched and reported upon. Yes. I will send the whole of that harem of yours spinning. All those women over there shall be dragged out of the shadows in which you hide them. If they are married women I shall write to their husbands. What if there *are* divorce cases! And as for this nasty daughter of yours – yes, nasty, nasty, dirty, filthy – off she goes out of your life! Or else publicity, Steenie. The

## THRENODY

Englishman's bête noire, publicity. I will leave your blessed flat in style. I will go to Claridges. It is Claridges they go to; isn't it? Anyhow it is one of those chic hotels. I will see interviewers. The more you resist the more pitiless I shall be. All London will talk of you. Obscure as you are I will drag you out of your obscurity. It will be a stinking case — trust me for that. Oh, my poor obdurate Steenie! but you have deserved it. I shall not relent. Stink I *will*.

'All this I shall do, Steenie. Ruthlessly. You had your last chance when you came here. For a day or so, it seemed almost like early times. And then you must take part against me with that leper woman who pretends to be a Baroness, with that mealy-faced Englishwoman — why doesn't the fool paint? — with the servants, with those people who stole our table. Just as it was with those insupportable Benniels. The same thing always. Always you are against me, Steenie. Always!'

She stared before her, brooding for a moment, and then my immobility compelled her to resume.

'Always against me. . . .

'Oh, I hate you. I *hate* you. I hate you. Never yet have I moved you to passion, to real passion — never. If once, if only once in our lives — you had wept! Now I will get something out of you, some reaction — even if it is nothing but hate and anger and cruelty. All this is your doing — all of it. The good in me is exhausted. I have done with love — for ever. Now — *hate!* I doubt if I could forgive you now whatever you

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did. I am your Enemy. We are at war. I want to ruin you, Steenie, I want to ruin you — and ruin you I will, expose and ruin you, whatever it costs me in the process. I want to hurt you — beyond all things I want to hurt you.

‘God, how I hate you — Steenie, how I *hate* you. If you could see inside my heart, Steenie, even you would be afraid. Wait till I come back to England. Wait till I deal with that incestuous degenerate of yours, that street drab, that filthy, simpering girl, as she deserves. Couldn’t you see? Even in that photograph . . .’

She was going on in this fashion, almost happily as these white-hot thoughts came to her, and then suddenly she stopped short and looked at me. Possibly it was because I was standing so still. Usually I fretted under fire or went away. She had to make sure I was attending. She caught some new quality of menace in my stillness, and suddenly I saw she was afraid. I cannot imagine what she found in my face. That too, I suppose, was impassive.

The abuse died on her lips and she stared at me. We held each other’s eyes. For a mute moment we saw each other bare.

Then she changed her expression to one of acute anguish. She clutched her side. ‘My pain!’ she cried. ‘My pain! Always you give me pain. I can’t bear it. Oo! Oooh! If only you had it. If only I could give you a taste of it. You give me black blood, you poison my blood. And then this pain comes. This terrible pain.

## THRENODY

Give me some Semondyle, you brute. Don't stand gloating there! You Sadist! Two little tablets, Steenie, dissolved. Two *little* tablets. How good that stuff is! . . .'

She drank.

'M'm'm'. . . .'

I tilted the glass.

### § 2

In the morning Marie went to her with her coffee and found her sprawling athwart her bed. The sheets were thrown back, and she seemed to be peacefully asleep. Marie put down the coffee and shook her to awaken her. But there was no awakening for Dolores.

Then it was that Marie perceived that the little tube of Semondyle was lying on its side beside the coffee tray she had just pushed on to the night table. It was empty and there was an empty tumbler against the water bottle and the electric lamp.

Marie seems to have taken in these particulars very exactly, before her feelings rose and she decided to scream and make a scene of it.

The sommelier who had brought Marie the coffee, the chambermaid and Monsieur and Madame Hunot were promptly on the spot, amazed, excited, but anxious not to alarm the other guests. They shut the door and made a swift but intensive scrutiny of the situation. At Madame Hunot's command they touched nothing.

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Then they came in a discreet brawl along the passage to summon me. They returned with me to Dolores' room like children who follow a Punch and Judy show in the street. They watched me intently as I went up to the body, satisfied myself that it was dead and cold and stood back a little regarding it. I had, as the cinema people say, registered little or no emotion for their entertainment, but then I was English. Marie was the first to break the silence of the room. 'Madame was very unhappy last night,' she said. 'She was distressed because M'sieu did not come to say good-night to her.'

I thought very quickly.

It would save a lot of inquiry and possibly suspicion if I let it go at that. But then I caught something odd in Marie's expression which accelerated my dismissal of a silly and cowardly impulse.

'I *did* say good-night to her,' I said. 'I was almost certainly the last person with her in this room last night. I was writing late, Marie, and you had already gone to bed when I came. It was long after midnight.'

There was a faint disappointment in Madame Hunot's voice. 'I heard you,' she said. She had had a momentary hope, I think, of saying that later – and more dramatically.

'And now,' I said, 'you and Monsieur Hunot probably know best what has to be done. You must send for a doctor and the commissaire of police. Everything I suppose must be left as it is.'

## THRENODY

Madame Hunot had telephoned for the commissaire and the doctor already.

'Nothing,' said Monsieur Hunot, standing before the closed door and acting under the prompting of his wife's eye, 'must be known about this in the hotel. It is the rule. You in particular' – he addressed Marie – 'must keep silence. You must say Madame is seriously ill – simply that. Not even Monsieur's chauffeur must be told. You understand? She is ill. And you Mathilde? And you Auguste? Not a word. Complete silence. You Auguste had better go downstairs and bring up Monsieurs Dobree and Donadieu when they arrive. Good.'

He opened the door for Auguste to depart, glanced out into the passage and shut the door again.

'This is a great blow to me,' I said, sitting down. 'Last night she was alive – her animation was extreme.'

'I heard her,' said Madame Hunot.

'I am stunned.'

'M'sieu may well be stunned,' said Monsieur Hunot.

'She was always animated,' said his wife. 'She was the most animated and charming woman I have ever had in this hotel. Monsieur will miss her greatly.'

'I do not begin to realize,' I said. I glanced towards the stiff silent figure on the bed. '*That* – is so totally unlike her.'

Several remarks of the same quality, punctuated by long pauses, ensued. It was a relief for us when Auguste ushered in the doctor, and still more so, when

## A PROPOS OF DOLORES

the police commissaire set things in action again. Two nondescripts percolated in the room, unchallenged by anyone. One I fancy was some sort of police subordinate and the other because of his notebook was I suspect the press. But their functions were never clearly defined.

We were all interrogated. The doctor made his contribution. The commissaire was a ruddy, white-fleshed man, badly buttoned up, unshaved and a little blasé. He dealt with his facts methodically and he was searching in his manner rather than his matter, when dealing with me. He walked about the room, he made nasty little noises to himself and then he would spin round, finger out, with a question. He tried hard to fix me to a precise minute for my overnight departure from the room, being no doubt in search of some discrepancy with M'me Hunot's testimony, he asked the exact time with authority, not to be denied, he asked it hectoringly, he asked it insidiously and confidentially, he asked it flatly and unexpectedly and however he asked it I answered tepidly that I did not know the exact time; then suddenly he gave way to fatigue and declared he would now seal up the room.

'Nobody must know,' said Madame Hunot as we dispersed on the landing and she put a dramatic finger on her lips. 'This is an hotel. The needs of many people have to be considered . . . Madame is ill and must not be disturbed. Understand?'

'Everything goes on as usual,' said Monsieur Hunot. A thin melancholy howl came from Marie's room.

## THRENODY

She clasped her hands. ‘He knows!’ she said. ‘Poor *leetle* Bayard! Poor innocent! He knows.’

I reflected. I perceived that on account of that howl I hated the little beast more than ever.

‘Better give him some breakfast,’ I said. ‘And take him out for a run.’

‘You would not like to see eem? He too will be unhappy. He understands so moch.’

I made no answer.

I came back thoughtfully to this room and sat at my desk here with my overnight notes before me.

### § 3.

I looked over what I had written overnight and it seemed the most natural thing to do to lock up this manuscript, shave and dress, go down for coffee and then return here and go on writing. I write now by a sort of inertia. I cannot go into the town and there is nothing else to do. I want to be on hand if there are any questions to be answered or any arrangements to be sanctioned. And also I am getting the situation into focus very slowly. Certain immediate facts demanded attention. Beyond that there is the immense shapeless intimation of an entirely reconditioned life.

And also, something more. . . .

I must set down in the confidence of this manuscript which I suppose is even less likely to be published now than when I first embarked upon it, a curious

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disturbing thing I have in my mind. I want to get it in writing even if I have to tear up what I have written as soon as I have set it down. But I want to get it in writing now projected before me. It is about that Semondyle.

Once or twice before I have had dreams so vivid and prosaic that I have had the utmost difficulty in distinguishing them from actual memories. Once or twice facts have thrown a somersault in my memory. And I am not sure whether at the moment when I should have put the two tabloids into a glass of water, it did not occur to me to put in the whole tubeful. It was a fresh tube, I noted, untouched. 'If this makes her sleep for ever,' I thought, quite calmly.

I remember no emotional colour to that; but simply the quiet acceptance of a reasonable opportunity. If it happened so, then I felt the gravity of what I had done so little that I walked back to my own room without the slightest uncertainty, I did not even wait to see the result of the overdose and I was not in the least flustered. I undressed and went to bed and went to sleep according to my usual routines. All that sounds improbable. Among other things it does not seem in my character to make so quick and unqualified a decision.

But was it such a very quick decision? Possibly I was more prepared for it than that. Even at my present age I still indulge in reverie. Many people indulge in reverie all through their lives. I cannot say how often I may not have had reveries of a wilful escape from Dolores.

## THRENODY

There are two definite things that I think count very much against me. One is that in the morning when I woke up I had a perfectly clear persuasion that presently someone would come and tell me that this thing had happened. Before I knew that Dolores was dead, I had a very definite conviction that she was dead.

The second thing that makes me believe that this affair with the tabloids had a certain element of reality, is my profound persuasion, and no one could know better than I, that Dolores would never dream of surrendering anything she had her grip upon and least of all the gift of life, without a struggle. Conceivably in the night, in a state between waking and sleeping, she may have dramatized a scene with me and threatened suicide after her wont and carried her histrionics to the pitch of swallowing those tablets, but even then I think there would have been time to ring for Marie and have an emetic.

Contrariwise I have on the side of the defence to consider that queer thread in my own character which makes it quite possible for me to invent a story against myself. It is quite possible that my subconsciousness may have given form to my undeniable discontent with Dolores in a particularly vivid dream – very apropos.

Manifestly this is a matter I can confide to nobody. No court of law is capable of deciding such fine issues as this involves. Indeed it is something that it would be unwholesome to brood over very much even within

## A PROPOS OF DOLORES

myself. I mean to dismiss it from my mind. Meanwhile I have to go on with the complicated duties this catastrophe has thrust upon me.

### § 4

This is going to be a very long and tedious day for me. Dolores we have arranged will be removed at midnight to-night, as secretly as possible, to the premises of Monsieur Debussy the brother-in-law of Monsieur Hunot, who will see to the pompe funèbre. Until then she remains 'sealed' in her room. The duties do not immediately deploy themselves. After a certain amount of notification and making appointments things settle down to a waiting phase. I realize that my conduct must be determined largely by what Torquéstol expects of me. I think I had better not walk beyond the town and that it would become me best to stand still in front of the Calvary for a time or sit and muse in the timbered and brightly painted church. The Baroness seems disposed to waylay me and I have avoided her with difficulty several times.

My mind sits down in a state of extreme inactivity before the bare, blank fact that Dolores is dead. It is difficult to describe how flat that leaves me. However it has happened, it comes to me as an astounding thing that it has happened. And I realize, for the first time, what an immense amount of my mental activities are arrested by this fact.

## THRENODY

Continually I have been poising myself against her for thirteen years and particularly on these excursions when we have been together, she has been incessantly present in my mind. I have held my mind always on the alert for surprises. Always I have been thinking what will she do next? Now abruptly there is nothing more that she can do. As Madame Hunot declared I am going to miss her greatly. I am going to miss her enormously.

I suppose a man who is unexpectedly cured of some chronic disease, supposed to be incurable, might find himself in this same state, a complete disappearance of a resistance against which he has been thrusting for years. . . .

My mind refuses to go any further now. This thing has bludgeoned me.

### § 5

*(Torquéstol, September 4th, 1934)*

Another enormous day has passed. A number of necessary formalities have been attended to, I have answered a monotony of interrogations and made various arrangements and decisions. It is accepted that Dolores took an overdose of Semondyle when half asleep. The question of suicide has not been raised.

Long ago Dolores, who cultivated a fear of being

#### A PROPOS OF DOLORES

buried alive, had extorted a promise from me that I would have a vein opened before her interment and for this I have arranged. I have also decided to have her buried here and to erect one of those heavy looking Breton crosses of solid granite carved with a sort of Keltic tracery over her remains. It is to bear the simple words 'Dolores, Pax'. The priest here, a young lean earnest priest, either with the idea of consoling me or to press a theological point against my possible scepticism was very urgent for the word 'Resurgam'. But on the whole I preferred 'Pax' simply.

I have got my trusted notary Charles Belot to come down here from Paris to deal with the landlord, because the bill on such occasions as this is apt to be an extraordinary one. The bereaved often feel a certain indisposition to haggle after a sudden death, and hotel custom throughout the world has adjusted itself to that fact. There is something graceless in disputing an account on the heels of a tragedy. But your lawyer deals with it in a different spirit. What has happened to me might very well happen to some needier holiday-maker and Belot will be defending not so much my purse as the widow and the fatherless.

I have arranged to sell the large blue car through an agent and with some slight difficulty I have parted from Alphonse. At first he would not take my decision seriously. 'I think Madame would have wished me to continue in your service,' he said. 'And she

## THRENODY

always admired the car – as I kept it.’ I consoled him a little by giving him his uniform. He assured me he would always be available if I reconsidered my decision.

I have given all of Dolores’ wardrobe to Marie, who took that as a matter of course. She too was a little disposed to doubt whether I could survive in Paris without her to keep an eye on me. But I think I can manage. The flat in Paris I shall dispose of with all its furniture; it is too large for my single needs and now it will be unbearable. I must have a pied-à-terre in Paris but I shall arrange things now in my own austerer fashion.

Bayard perplexed me for a time. He is not what I should call an endearing dog and his prospects in life were by no means happy. I thought of giving him to Marie who has always professed an admiration for him only second to that of his mistress. But when I suggested the gift to her, her immediate answer was that it would cost a small fortune to feed him because of the delicacy of his stomach, and there was something so much less than love in her eye as she regarded our panting problem that suddenly I turned against the idea. It was borne in upon me that the only proper place for him, now as ever, was at the feet of his beloved mistress. I understood for the first time in my life the sentiments that prompted the people of the ancient world to make a reverential holocaust of all the ruler’s favourites when he died. I tried to get the idea over with the young priest here and the

#### A PROPOS OF DOLORES

pharmacist, Monsieur and Madame Hunot and Belot when he came, and they all, after a little explanation, seemed to realize the fitness of my proposal. So Bayard will be put to sleep for ever by the vet to-morrow morning and buried unostentatiously just outside the consecrated ground. After all he must be nearly ten years old and on the verge of obese decay. He would be unable to keep himself clean and no one now will do it for him. Marie would be a beast to him. He would lose his snuffling lordliness—smack by smack. He would become a stinking apprehensive-eyed little old dog, less and less capable of not being trodden on. This best becomes his petty dignity.

To-morrow too Dolores will be laid to rest and my visit here which began so cheerfully, will come to an end. I feel extremely undecided about my own course of action. There is really nothing going on in London or at Durthing to recall me there now. I had fixed everything in order until October. Several of my key men there are taking holidays and the new people I may want to bring in now will be out of town. Either I shall return to Paris to dismantle the flat, go back to England by way of St. Malo or wire to Lettice to join me at Havre and take her for that educational tour upon the continent that my imagination has been planning at the back of my mind for her for the past year.

## § 6

I have been turning over this manuscript. I do not know what I shall do with it. Much of it seems to me now to be hard and unjust to Dolores, and much could have been told in her favour that does not appear. But I am loth to destroy it. It is a picture of a relationship even if it is not the portrait of a person. I doubt if I ought to touch a word of it now. It would lose in sincerity what it gained in amiability. I think I will jot down some further descriptions of events here and then later on complete it or simply end it at this point. It was begun not as a story but as an essay upon happiness and in spite of this tragic interruption the main arguments remain.

It will relieve my brain from this wheel that keeps going round in it, saying over and over again, ‘Dolores is dead, and what will you do now?’ Let me biologize.

Where was I?

That idea of a multiple heredity in mankind still seems to me plausibly valid. I want to turn it over a little more in my mind. Perhaps it is true that what we call *Homo sapiens* is a confluence of once divergent species, but also it may be that it is throwing up new mutations able to survive, mutations of a mental rather than of a physically visible sort, some of which are conceivably better adapted to the new conditions of human life that are appearing now. There may be new sorts of people dropping like the first drops of a

### A PROPOS OF DOLORES

summer shower into the world – mixing in with the old. I want to digest these ideas and experiment in stating them. . . .

I cannot go on with that – for the present at least.

I find myself feeling abominably lonely here now. In between these interviews and arrangements and solemn last duties, I do not know what to do with myself. I have been so accustomed for the past thirteen years to subordinate my movements to the aggressions of Dolores that I seem to have lost the power of entirely spontaneous movement altogether. Torquéstol evidently thinks I ought to lead a sort of suspended existence, to pace the town rather than walk about it and avert my eyes from anything in the least degree amusing. Brittany, we must remember, takes life in general and death in particular more seriously than any other province in Europe.

I stalk slowly and gloomily out of the town and it is only after a walk of a kilometre or more, hands behind the back and eyes to the ground, that my natural indisposition to scandalize anybody is satisfied. Then I brisk up, put my hands in my pockets, whistle and accost passing birds, sheep, dogs and children. My craving for companionship is so great that I spent half an hour yesterday discussing various matters of biological philosophy with a small shaggy-haired pony who stuck his head over a gate. He was taciturn but, I felt, thoroughly sound. He seemed to be as much in the mood for company as I was.

## THRENODY

Queer beast you are, I thought; my cousin many million times removed. Yet bone for bone except for a canine tooth or so, this long hammer-head of yours corresponds with mine. Your cranium has a brain, so like mine that if it were dissected out and put in a bottle of spirits with its nerves cut off many non-medical people would guess it was human. Your cranial nerves, your facial and pneumogastric and all the rest of them, spread to the very pattern of mine except for slight differences of scale and proportion because of this long jowl of yours. They behave, I am sure, in the same way. You flick your ears with a vigour I envy, and your bold outstanding eye has an inspeculative glow far beyond any of my recessed expressions. And you wear your hair all down your neck instead of on top like mine. Hence straw hats for horses. Hairy you are, but you are free to call me bald-faced; and your cheek and neck were made for stroking. You are capable of all this frank mute friendliness, and had I an apple in my pocket for you our confidence and understanding would be complete. How far can you go in the way of my perplexities? 'Such is life,' you seem to say. 'Not had in the air and sunshine.'

On the whole I am inclined to agree. Compared with me your simplicity is stupendous. You have a cerebrum, as capable of storing memories as mine and not so tremendously smaller. But what do you do with it? Your memory of routes and places is said to be remarkable by all human standards. Your grey

### A PROPOS OF DOLORES

matter is a magnificent big-scale road map. Apart from that, does it all lie fallow inside there?

You ought to be very teachable. Your brain must have a wealth of undeveloped regions. How do you associate your ideas, such as they are? Either you underwork that brain of yours scandalously or I over-work mine. I'm all symbols, word-symbols and complicated intercommunications of which you don't begin to have an idea. If your way of linking cell to cell is like a messenger going from one to the other, mine is like the telephone exchange of a big city. If you meet another pony, you see it and smell it and touch it, whinny and so forth and get your straightforward idea of what it means to you, but when I meet another human being or write or telegraph, I call up a whole world of ideas in a blaze of detail by the suggestion of a few words. And then more. The phrases bubble up and multiply like scum in a boiling pot and in a little while I neither know what the other people mean to me nor what I mean to myself. I doubt if you think about yourself at all. You just see, hear, smell, and feel directly and then you react. You never think 'I am' and still less do you think 'I ought to be'.

But I am one of these thinking beasts who have been afflicting the world and ourselves for the last few hundred thousand years or so. We have got a new thinking and co-operating apparatus called language and in some ways it has proved remarkably efficient. That is why you are in a paddock and rather bored

## THRENODY

instead of being out upon a prairie. That is why you have to stick your head over the top of this gate which you haven't the wit to open, in order to talk to me. You stay where you're put and go where we drive you. I am in the habit of assuming that we are able to do this to you by using our brains, but at the back of my mind there is a curious doubt stirring, whether we do really use our brains or whether they use us. At times it seems as though they have usurped control of the simple apes we used to be. They are very much out of control. They are for ever nagging us to know what we are doing with ourselves and with the rest of you living creatures whose fates are in our hands. These brains of ours I can assure you won't leave us alone. They have taken to inventing things and the things they invent are often quite unmanageable. Do you know what it is to have a sleepless night? Does the man use the brain then or the brain the man? You may be man-rid, but I am brain-rid. And as uncertain of the journey ahead.

I put this new idea to my pony something after that fashion. All we mammals have been accumulating brains quite beyond our immediate needs, we have accumulated them indeed through our individual need to survive, but now suddenly with speech and writing and computation and record and communications, these brains break out from their original immediate preoccupations, get into touch, stimulate one another, react upon and enhance one another so that now we human beings are all floated

### A PROPOS OF DOLORES

off our private feet and out of our private holes and corners, into a sort of common mind, which produces inventions, novel ideas of conduct, collective guiding ideas. Our brains have run away with us and seem to be pooling themselves over us. We cease to be exclusively ourselves. You are a pony and there your brain begins and ends, but I am Stephen Wilbeck mixed up with all those other people past and present who have given way to ideas. Perhaps you would like me to tell you more about that. There have been stages, you must understand, in this usurpation of the brain, since it woke up from the limited inaggressive usefulness of your intelligence. One could write a sort of history of the rise of the Brain Empire in the Animal World. First the brain discovered individuality and concentrated itself about itself to produce the furious egotism of the Dolores stage of human progress – you will understand that, my dear pony, as well as anything else I am saying to you – and then secondly came the realization of a possible collective mind, a New Deal altogether, and the brain began to launch these attacks against egotism which we call religion, science and philosophy. First the evolution of the conscious brain gathered *Homo* up into an individual egotism like a clenched fist, and then it (Nature or the Life Force or what you will) seemed to realize it had gone too far and turned upon itself. And so we have our moral conflict.

And then I told that pony, or else I took it for granted that he knew, all about Dolores and myself,

## THRENODY

how incompatible we had been, how we were really of different species or at least different grades in mental development, and how my life for thirteen years had been yoked indissolubly to her inaccessible, irresponsible ego. ‘And suddenly,’ I said, patting him, ‘suddenly and unreasonably it is over.’

In very much that fashion I thought and even at times spoke to this friendly pony, patting him ever and again or stroking his nose softly. ‘And now what do you think I ought to be doing?’ I said. ‘Forget about it, eh? Forget those thirteen years? That would be your way. If I opened this gate for you now, out you would trot. Leaving the paddock behind you. Into the open road and down towards the heather there, clatter clop – and Heaven knows what would happen to you! You’d sniff the air. You’d have a sort of prancing expectation. But as for the past ! . . .

Well – my gate is open now. . . .

‘Do they put you in a cart? Do they ride you? How has your owner broken you in? My brain has made a responsible wagon for me, which we call a publishing business, and I dispense knowledge. But doing that job isn’t all I ask for, I am not completely subdued to it, and I doubt if *you* would head at once for yon cart shed. Something different from that there would be even in your elementary brain if the gate came open suddenly. Expectation. Something you want that will respond to you and make you happy. You seem as unsuited as I am for loneliness. Which is why we are hanging over this gate together.’

## A PROPOS OF DOLORES

And so on. And while I thought and talked biological nonsense to this pony I found my plans growing clearer. Now they are quite clear. I shall leave Torquéstol to-morrow as soon as the funeral is over. And I shall telegraph for Lettice from Morlaix. Some human company I must have; someone to bother me and fill up this vacuum Dolores has left behind her.

I feel strange and rather lost. I do not feel in the least as a widower might be supposed to feel. I am thinking very little of Dolores and very much about myself. My mood is changing slowly, recovering buoyancy. Yesterday I was completely inert. I felt like a stone. To-day I feel rather more like a new-laid egg.

As though thus far my life has consisted chiefly in getting laid. I am looking forward to a personal future that except for the expanding interest of my work, persists in remaining entirely blank of intention or any shape of desire.

### § 7

(*Torquéstol, September 5th, 1934*)

I have half an hour before I need lock my bags. Everything is over. On the bed sprawl various crumpled black garments, about which I suppose I ought to tell something. Although it is just the sort of thing I should like to tell about anyone else and which I hate to tell about myself.

There was, you see, a little crisis at the last moment, due to an odd negligence on my part. It was

a queer little clash between the new world and the old. I realized my default only when Belot arrived. He was dressed in black from top to toe, crape round his bowler hat, black gloves! He carried a small parcel beside his valise, a black-edged paper bag. An expression of scandalized dismay spread over his candid round face at the sight of me.

'Mais M'sieu. Votre deuil!'

'Gods!' I cried. 'Of course!'

Here was Torquéstol with every shop with a shutter up or a blind down, out of respect to my desolation, and I was going about and had intended to go to the funeral in a grey tourist suit and a trilby hat. I looked at my watch and made my plans very rapidly. 'Twenty-five minutes,' said I, 'and we dare not walk too fast. Come.'

I went in vast wide slow strides so as to get to the draper's as quickly as possible while keeping up the solemnity of the occasion. That at any rate was what I was trying to do. I felt I undulated. 'What do you think we can buy?' I gasped. Belot being much shorter than I trotted beside me. 'I *had* thought of a new cravat for M'sieu and gloves! Mais — !'

'They will have ready-made clothes,' I said — but there I was over-hopeful. Torquéstol goes for its clothes by bus to Chavonet.

Belot was marvellous in the shop. He explained matters in exactly the right way. 'M'sieu est devenu fou de chagrin. Pas de deuil! et le cortège part dans une demi-heure! Que faire?'

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The little old general dealer was splendid. There were no difficulties. Nothing but help. But also there were no clothes. She was swift, excited, but impeccably funereal and understanding. Everything in the half-light of the semi-closed shop was done in hushed undertones or without any words whatever. It was the most extraordinary prelude to a funeral. Somehow my worldliness had to be blacked out. A kind of exaltation was upon us all. She would have a sudden thought, put a finger on her lips, rush off and reappear with a large piece of black silk, magnificent black silk. ‘Non?’

Not a black complet in stock? No. Only an assortment of coloured corduroy trousers, gloomily coloured but still coloured. But surely in some manner the cloth might be draped about M’sieu and pinned!

I had a bright idea. ‘Monsieur Debussy! Comment s’appelle cet homme? Fournisseur des pompes funèbres? A coté. Peut-être aura-t-il des pantalons noirs supplémentaires!’

‘Parfait!’ cried Belot. ‘Magnifique!’ darted off to the undertaker’s next door and returned triumphant in a trice with a large frock coat, a black sash, a tri-colour sash and trousers enough for an octopod. These he cast about before me.

‘V’la un choix de pantalons! Monsieur Debussy a une certaine grandeur, mais – !’

But the reserve frock coat of M. Debussy proved impossibly ample.

Nevertheless the cortège was only five minutes late

## THRENODY

in starting and I took my proper place in the procession in a costume acceptable to Torquéstol standards. We had got quite a passable Breton hat, a young buck's black hat, a modernized towny shape and not too ample in the brim, and round that after extracting a rakish grouse feather we had put a band of crape. Over my waistcoat I wore a sort of soutane overcoat buttoned about me rather tightly, a loan from the housekeeper of the young curé; this was made the more binding by the black sash, and the pantalons supplémentaires concertinaed only very slightly. The grandeur of M. Debussy was a grandeur largely of the body and that part of the pantalon could be tucked and folded away. My brown boots were blackened by Debussy's bonne à tout faire with a whole tinful of blacking. When I had got them on my hands too were in mourning. Belot proffered gloves — roomy gloves but they did the job. *Time!* I took one look at myself in the shop mirror. I looked an unmitigated scoundrel. I looked like the villain in a Victorian melodrama. But I was, it seems, correct. Passably correct. And there was no going back now.

I reached the hotel just in time to kill a rumour that I had destroyed myself. Amazement gave place to intelligent sympathy as a certain oddity about me was explained. 'Fou de chagrin.' 'Le pauvre Monsieur.' I was guided to my place promptly but very sympathetically. Off we went.

I had to control a strong impulse to bolt. I was out of breath and in a state of farcical excitement by that

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time, but Belot carried on through the whole business like a court functionary. The more preposterous a detail, the more correct he made it seem and the more reassuring were his gestures to me. Should I ever be able to walk with the grandeur of M. Debussy pleated about me? Something seemed to be shifting. I clasped a loose-gloved black hand upon my stomach as gracefully as possible. Parfait. I walked, stooping slightly, hand below my heart. My imagination rioted with what might happen if I withdrew my hand. If I did so - ? If I bolted. But how could I bolt entangled in those trousers? I felt the intent gaze of the bystanders upon me. I resisted the impulse to provide still further tests for their immense gravity. It was so fantastic that for a time I crossed the verge of hysteria. I gasped like one about to sneeze. I met Belot's anxious eye, by no means sure of me. I felt that at any moment I might shout with laughter. I pulled out my handkerchief with my free hand and sobbed for breath and then giggled into it. I found my eyes bedewed. That was better. I sobered down. I relaxed upon the waist and it still held.

Already as I write I am forgetting these emotional phases. They are already queer and unaccountable to me. They are becoming distorted. They do not flow into one another; they lie like jagged fragments in my mind. For a time, I know, I felt extravagantly apologetic to Dolores, ahead there in the coffin. This ought not to have happened anyhow. I was sincerely ashamed of myself. I ought to have thought of the

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mourning. It was so unfair to her, so acutely unfair – to treat her like this upon her last social occasion. This comic *deuil* and all the rest of it was like making faces behind her defeat. I had been taken by surprise. Far better the callousness of the grey suit. A crape brassard would have been more than sufficient. I did not like doing something she would have hated, which but for this pitiless immobilization that has seized her, would have made her thrust the coffin-lid aside and scream reprisals at me.

Incredible indeed that she was not already sitting up and sweeping us all away in a torrent of vituperation. Meanwhile by a sort of inertia the funeral I knew would go on. Nothing I felt could deflect its grave inevitability. In Bretagne, however the corpse behaves, a funeral is a funeral. The idea of Dolores sitting up and talking at her own funeral cut capers in my imagination. I began to think of things she might have said. Tremendous things. I thought of her expression when her eye caught mine and she saw my mourning. Was I chic? Was this chic? She who had always been so chic. I should answer back. A violent altercation en route. How the devil could one be chic in trousers like this? She would appeal as ever to the audience. Did they think a woman of her birth and breeding should consent to be buried like this? She would rehearse a fresh version of her autobiography. Then she would turn to the young curé already rather puzzled and amazed. . . .

In some such way, if not exactly in that way, my

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thoughts misbehaved. I think that suddenly I shouted 'Hah!'

I clapped my handkerchief to my face and that second momentary impulse to laughter passed. A grave little girl walking demurely by the side of the cortège made a prim mental note of this detail of grief à l'anglaise.

My mind turned over. This hysteria was frightful. It was ugly beyond words. It came to me that it was extravagantly pitiful Dolores could not cut a figure at her own interment. Not at all funny. Cruel. There could never be any more fluent self-explanations, self-vindications for her, now for ever. Henceforth she would lose her case by default, in silence. I thought of her stillness and my heart ached for her. Poor extravagant Dolores! Whose one outlet of living has been a torrent of self exposition. She was inside there *gagged*. I seemed to hear her: 'Let me speak, Steenie, let me speak.' I wished I could have let her speak. Maybe it would not have been so very outrageous. She was not always outrageous. Her mischiefs and meannesses went out of the picture. Her passion to hurt and injure became now merely silly. At times she had been delightfully absurd. Perhaps I had been unreasonably impatient with her. After all had any insult of hers really hurt me? How endearingly ridiculous she had been at Roscoff. . . .

I began to think of her best moments and to forget all the rest. Tenderness followed pity. To my utmost amazement, I wept. I wept simply and genuinely

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for that intolerable woman! And because she was silent!

By the time we reached the cemetery these crazy oscillations of mind and nerves were subsiding and soon I had myself entirely under control. I did all that was expected of me with apathetic correctitude.

## CHAPTER VI

### LETTICE AND APHRODITE

(*Nantes, September 25th, 1934*)

#### § 1

I FIND that I have not touched this manuscript for three weeks. While I was at Torquéstol everything insisted on my writing; there was nothing else to do. My room and my speculations about Dolores and happiness and life generally were a refuge from the deadliest boredom. I seemed to have done every possible walk about the place. I took Dolores for excursions but that did not constitute a whole time job. She spent some hours on her toilet and she read in bed. There was my room and there was a desk and there was all that unavoidable leisure. Anyone might become an author in such circumstances.

I had to stick it at Torquéstol. I had been cheating Dolores of my presence in France for some time, she was in a state of nervous disorder and I had determined to give her a fair four weeks at least of holiday. My successive entries have recorded how this determination worked out. I had intended to tranquillize her indeed, but not so completely as I seem to have done.

## LETTICE AND APHRODITE

For the past three weeks I have been going about with Lettice, but that I will write about presently. Lettice has recently struck up a friendship with a small carful of people from the Portsmouth district, Bunnington the name is, a mother, son and two daughters whose route has interlaced with ours; common interests have developed, a standing joke or so laces their intercourse, and they have, so to speak, taken her off my hands and gone with her to the Castle and to the Museum of Beaux Arts. Then they will lunch at some place starred and recommended near the river and then do the Cathedral. It seems a good stiff day of earnest rather than penetrating sightseeing they are in for. In the evening I shall dine with them and send them off to a cinema with my blessing. This room in this hotel has just the lighting and furniture conducive to writing. Its chairs are sympathetic without being soporific. It has an attractive desk, lit if necessary by a bright, low, shaded light.

But if so far I have not written since *Torquéstol* I have been turning over matters in my mind. And one or two things have happened — one thing in particular . . . But that I will come to in its place. Until it happened and partly dislodged her, Dolores remained the central reality in my meditations. My brain insisted upon it. My attempt to distract my attention by an educational tour of Brittany with Lettice has proved quite unsuccessful. Nobody could keep interested in an educational tour with Lettice.

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Dolores had an undeniably emphatic personality and Lettice is by comparison pallid and ineffective, and Dolores had thirteen years, and very central years they were, of my life, in which to make her impression.

Perhaps I shall never have that much intensity of impression of any human being again. I have known her close and frank and all ways up and beyond all pretending. In my exploration of myself and human life, she has to be my chief material now. My chief objective material. Perhaps I know her all the more distinctly because I always to a certain extent disliked her. Even when I was physically in love with her. That drew the lines sharper. Marriage flings us poor human beings under each other's noses like rabbits slapped down in a biological laboratory. Only continually it is the same rabbit. It is moreover a reciprocal rabbit and the dissector also finds himself dissected. And even after the rabbit has been removed the mind still works upon its memory.

Let me recapitulate these laboratory notes of mine and see how I have travelled. I started off at Portumere with a comparison between extrovert and introvert minds. I was extrovert and by implication Dolores was not. But that was right off the mark. I am extrovert and introvert as the mood comes or goes, and so was Dolores. On the whole she was I think more extrovert than I.

But while she always related what she saw to herself as directly as possible, as a child wants to handle and play with and appropriate anything that attracts

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its notice, I had a much more elaborate and self-protective trick of observant detachment. There I think I arrived at a real difference.

And going on from that I developed an idea of grades or species of detachment. Was this difference between us acquired or innate? I tried over the idea that it was innate, that there were species of mind with interests so completely concentrated on the conscious self that they could do nothing good or bad without seeing themselves in the centre of the picture, and other minds without any such complete convergence of reference, so that they could think and even at times act with complete self-forgetfulness. The characteristics of these types could be masked or qualified by culture, but essentially they were innate.

Pursuing our inquiry, said the professor, we discussed and dismissed the idea that there was a sexual difference here. Both sexes may easily misunderstand this situation, because the ego-centred man or woman is likely to strike more vividly and disagreeably upon the attention of the other sex than the decentralized type. Allowing for that, the difference we are investigating is a specific and not a sexual one. Ego-centred men and women are in a class together and so are decentralized men and women.

But whether men or women predominate in either class is an issue I leave open.

A question that has been exercising me since I picked up Lettice for this tour, is whether the opposition of these types has anything to do with moral or

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religious standards. Was Dolores *bad* and am I *good*? – except maybe for a slight slip with a tube of tabloids. I ask that question because since we left St. Malo I have experienced quite a surfeit of churches, crosses, altars, shrines, calvaries, former convents and saintly legends. Brittany is a religious country just as Bengal is a religious country, and its inhabitants are much concerned with the things that are commonly called 'spiritual'. This 'spiritual' is forced upon one.

But what are these things called spiritual? I have stood or sat as silently as possible and watched almost immobile solitary praying figures for big fractions of an hour at a time and tried to fathom what they could be praying about, I have seen women flitting into confessionals, watched the priests going with a sort of shuffling noiselessness about their sacred functions, seen candles lit and candles extinguished beyond number, listened to masses, both closely and far off, heard the organ pealing and the choir boys singing. I have bought and read various small books of devotion and several lives of sometimes charming and sometimes perfectly disgusting saints. Spirituality I could not find in it, only pious magic and a superstitious materialism. I am left asking has all this religious business, this so-called spirituality, anything at all to do with this fundamental question of the centralization or decentralization of the ego?

Most properly grown-up people asked that at venture would answer incontinently that it had, that here was the clue, if only I would avail myself of it

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to all my questionings. But is it a clue at all? Dolores for example had a religious phase of some intensity before she met me. She had thought of taking to the religious life and becoming the Bride of Christ. But her craving to be the centre of attention was if anything stimulated rather than subdued by the idea of taking Heaven by storm. Her devotion did not move her one jot from her egotism, and as she resented more and more the entire lack of exclusive reciprocal emotion on the part of the Bridegroom, his spiritual promiscuity so to speak, she turned her attention to her confessor. The unfortunate man reciprocated slightly, kissed her on the forehead, kissed her on the cheeks and kissed her lips and then repented and confessed. Which brought her religious career to an abrupt conclusion.

My interest in religion is that of a complete outsider. My father seems to have mislaid his faith early in his life, and I did not receive the advantage or disadvantage of definite religious instruction. ‘Bias’ was what my father called it, excluding the issue of advantage or disadvantage altogether, and his only definite action in the matter was to warn me elaborately against what he called the ‘false opposition’ of material and spiritual. He would expatiate upon that ‘unjustifiable distinction between the worldly and the spiritual – between the flesh and the spirit’ which is based, he declared, on the rude assumptions of a primitive physics about substance and essence. There was, he insisted, even to a rare pitch of emphasis, no such

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dualism. Assuming it, he said, was the mental Fall of Man. It was the key error of our race. Most people learnt it with language and never suspected the twist they had been given. Statements without the twist were simply inexplicable to them.

'Oh! Beware of that word "spiritual",' said my father. 'It's a buttered slide. It means nothing and like all completely empty words, it is a deadly trap for any but the most wary and penetrating intelligences. . . You, my boy, I warn.'

The older I grow the more I grow up to my father. I realize that I inherit much more than a well-organized business from him and that a large part of what I used to regard as my own personal thinking is really his insidious heredity. Even my thoughts about the social functions of the business I realize were also his. He had never bothered to explain. If I thought like that I should think like that. Precept would not help. Except for that fundamental warning.

It was the dream of his life to edit the Epistles of St. Paul, whom he regarded as the cardinal exponent of this unfortunate dichotomy in human thought so far as the western world is concerned.

Since then I have read and re-read St. Paul with considerable interest; I have been reading him in the past three weeks to see how far he was concerned, as I suspect he was, with just this distinction between ego-centred and non ego-centred types, how far he was feeling his way round and about this contrast in human motivation that has been occupying me. For that is the

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problem we all come to when our minds grow out of ready-made clothing; the escape from the personal preoccupation, the 'body of this death'. More of us are exercised by it to-day than ever before.

I like St. Paul. I have always liked his mental quality. There was something conscientiously evasive about him that I find very congenial. An exploring mind must not fix itself into over definite phrases. You cannot say a thing plain until you see it plain. Once hit in a brain storm by an extravagant idea and carried away by it, Paul was thereafter very shy of it. He had jumped to the conclusion that he could rehabilitate Messianism by associating it with Mithraistic sacrifice. He had committed the fatal error of trying to put the new wine of his thoughts into old bottles, into the old phrases of Messianistic hope and the Mithraists' blood bath. But he had launched himself upon the career of an apostle of a revised new faith, from which it was hard to retreat.

As the first vehement lucidity of his conception of salvation wore off, he evidently lived a life of intense brain-searching trying to recover it. The Epistles to the Galatians, the Hebrews, the Corinthians, are so plainly discussions with himself. He projects his doubts as errors in other people and reproves them. I wish he had been at Torquéstol last month instead of that misogynist fisherman. We should have argued with a passionate inconclusiveness.

His ingenious dodging away from any endorsement of bodily and even personal immortality in his

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first Epistle to the Corinthians is a perfect example of that hoodwinking of the passionate inattentive disciples to which men of our quality are prone. We have a cowardly dread of destroying their confidence in us. They settle down so happily in what has been said and we lack the heart to tell them that on the long long march towards truth there are still uncounted miles to go and not always straight miles at that. Millions of the faithful must have heard and read that stuff and believed he was saying the exact opposite of what he says. How little they have heeded his metaphors! It has been made part of the burial service, when feeling overrides thought, but even so—!

His Epistles are indeed an admirable record of just such intellectual fumblings as ours of to-day. His riddles are the same. His Old Adam and New Adam are, I am convinced, my *Homo regardant* and *Homo rampant*, overlapping one another. But he believed with obstinate assurance that by some magic of conversion one could be changed into the other. And that one was *good* and the other *bad*.

That is where I differ from him. It is a question for judgment and observation. Did he ever know any human being as exhaustively as I knew Dolores? Did he know himself as I am beginning to know myself? Nothing short of Semondyle, I am convinced, could have released Dolores from her absolute concentration upon her ego, and nothing whatever justifies any belief that I am higher or better in any way than she was. We were profoundly different; that

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is all. She belonged by nature to a world that is manifestly working out its own destruction by excesses of acquisition, assertion and malice, and I, to the best of my knowledge and belief, belong to a new, less acutely concentrated world that may or may not be able to emerge — wriggle out rather than emerge — from the ruins and survive.

Nevertheless St. Paul, allowing for his times, allowing for the elementariness of his metaphysics and his innocence of any biological conceptions whatever, allowing for his obsession by politico-social Messianistic theories and particularly by the brooding expectation of a Second Coming, was I find a very congenial intelligence indeed.

And even that Second Coming idea which gave a form to a widespread realization of the instability of the Roman Empire, was not in its quality so very remote from the pervading apprehension we have in our world to-day, of some imminent vast change — world revolution, the final war catastrophe, we have no phrase for it — after which **we**, too, try to anticipate the Spirit of Man returning to earth in all its glory. . . .

For no particular reason. . . .

What, after all, is my *Way of the World* series if it is not Messianic? Messianic without a Messiah — or rather with an epidemic of star-begotten New Adams.

So far as practical vision went St. Paul certainly saw the world very much as I see it, even if he saw it from a different standpoint and so interpreted it

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differently; he argued his thoughts out frankly like a gentleman, side-stepping a complication now and then but never denying it; and I am sure if he had been with us in this little tour we have made from St. Malo to St. Michel's Mont and back by Morlaix to Brest and Plougastel and Quimper and amidst the grizzled elders of Carnac and Ménec and so hither to Nantes, he would have gone into the churches with me in an entirely brotherly fashion and wondered as much as I did, what all the blue and red timbering and quaint images — so plainly dedicated to Isis, Star of the Sea, and the infant Horus, had to do with that taming and controlling of the self-concentrated soul which in spite of the theological distortions of his mind, is, I insist, the central problem in his Epistles.

The crucifix he would have recognized and that would have interested him. But its common use in exorcism would have puzzled him. His symbol of man's resurrection from the carnal self has become a purely materialistic weapon here, all blood and tears, a piece of sadistic luck invocation. ‘But the *Resurrection?*’ he would have asked. ‘How do they symbolize that?’

‘Like a gentleman who has just done a conjuring trick,’ I should say. ‘Up he goes extending demonstrative hands. After which the meeting, never having realized any internal need for a resurrection at all, disperses.’

It would have been worth while to have taken him to the great calvary at Plougastel and gone over the

## LETTICE AND APHRODITE

whole legend of Christianity with him there and see how much of it he recognized. ‘What are these *Gospels* you keep quoting?’ he would have said. ‘I never heard of them.’

I suppose it would offend most Christians beyond measure to tell them suddenly that St. Paul had never read the Gospels. Just as it is an outrage to point out that Shakespeare burlesques him in the most disrespectfully familiar manner in Bottom’s speech after his dream. We never mention it. But I decline to make Paul a sacred figure. He was too good for that. If these Christians would only do less reverential gasping and more intelligent bible-reading, how much more lucid their minds would be! When Matthew Arnold tried to make the Anglicans cerebrate he had to invoke St. Paul. What other of these founder saints has had the vitality to be contemporary age after age?

But Plougastel would have made him open his eyes.

I imagine him with his bandy legs apart, a short and sturdy figure he was, according to that second century record, the *Acts of Paul*, and for the life of me I cannot resist endowing him with plus-fours, clapping a golfing cap on his bald head and pulling it down over his ‘slightly prominent nose’.

‘That is your friend St. Peter,’ I should point out rather tactlessly. ‘And there you see him again. And there! . . .’

‘Yes, yes,’ he would say, a little impatiently. ‘I see. I see. I *knew* Peter. Quite well. Almost the only one

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of the Jerusalem group I knew. A very reasonable man to deal with.'

And his eyes under those confluent eyebrows of his and under the peak of his cap, would wander in an unsatisfied search over the stony multitude and at last come to rest in reproachful inquiry on me.

But there are very few signs of respect for St. Paul in Brittany. St. Paul when he does turn up – usually as St. Pol – is St. Paul Aurelian, a magical Welshman of no intellectual significance whatever.

This green and grey Brittany, this land of softly rounded granite, is a very old-fashioned land indeed, dreaming of past enchantments and with no thought whatever for a new world of things incredible, a futuristic world which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor hath it entered yet into the mind of man to conceive – wherein we shall all be members of one body – and so forth. These Bretons would almost as soon subscribe to my *Way of the World* series as read St. Paul. He and I are fellow moderns here; both of us entirely out of this Celtic dream of existence.

But I hear Lettice tripping along the passage to her room and in a minute or so she will be tapping at my door.

'Tea-ee,' she will say; 'Daddly-dear. I want my tea.'

She has said that quite several times already and I believe that originally she devised the formula and intonation for the benefit of George Hoopler.

## LETTICE AND APHRODITE

‘Tea-ee.’

This section is not what I sat down to write at all.

I was going to write about something that has happened to me quite recently and I have wandered away from it. St. Paul was the last person I expected would come into my head. For I had intended to write about falling in love. I must try again after dinner.

### § 2

(*Nantes. Evening of the Same Day. September 25th, 1934*)

I wonder now why I sent for Lettice.

I think that after Dolores’ death I had a sort of panic of loneliness. I do not know how it may be with older people but from the cradle up to the forties at any rate, the routine of the common day for ordinary human beings is a series of close contacts with and reactions to other individuals. Night and day there is this closeness for most of us. Nowadays perhaps there is more sleeping alone than there ever was before, more people paint or write or study or do their business alone, thanks largely perhaps to increased lighting and heating and ampler housing. But instinct is still for intimate association.

And like all instincts, when this instinct for association goes unsatisfied or imperfectly satisfied it conjures up dreams and reverie. Just as the starving think of

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feasts, and just as lost men in forest and rain conjure up the vision of a door opening into a lit warm interior. And it is clear now to me that for some years my imagination has been making its subtle protests against the hard intellectualism and business concentrations of my work in England and the alien circumstances of my married life. I have established a certain number of respect-friendships in England, alliances and co-operations and so forth, but what this suggestion corner of my brain, around which the dreams float and the reveries are born, what it has always pressed me towards has been something closer, in which miracles of natural understanding were to be interwoven inextricably with the incessant contacts of everyday affairs.

And it was perfectly natural for the reverie factory in my very normal heterosexual brain to embody this intimacy in a feminine personality, and for me to develop the idea of a close and distinctive association with this lost daughter of mine as soon as the resumption of relations occurred to me. I was romantically excited about her. I suspect now that most childless people have exaggerated ideas of the amount of natural understanding between parents and children. In the matter of accumulations and discharges of nervous energy, moods, fits of temper, muscular co-ordinations and so forth, there may be close affinities in a family, but acquired habits of behaviour and determining intellectual forms accumulate so rapidly and are so independent of heredity as to make that fundamental

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stuff between them relatively unimportant. Normal people are made and not born and gifts and talents avail little without the co-operation of opportunity.

The story of these last weeks is a comedy of disillusionment. It began with myself on the quay at St. Malo awaiting the arrival of the Southampton boat. I stood like a lover, scrutinizing the clustering little dark figures that were growing by imperceptible degrees into recognizable human beings. At last one could distinguish garments and features. And then suddenly I saw standing up far forward on a seat or something that raised her above the others, a slender young woman waving to me, with her black skirts and her black cloak whipping away from her like the tail of a half furled flag. My daughter! She was in mourning! For a moment I was puzzled and then I remembered. Alice of course had seen to that.

Now I had already seen and talked to this young woman a score of times and there was no justification whatever for any illusions about her, and yet so powerful was the wish in me that my heart beat fast as I waved back to her.

She landed. The black gave a gravity to her pretty youthfulness. She met me with a certain intimation of sympathetic sadness that passed when we kissed. I asked about Alice and Hoopler but nothing was said of Dolores. It was too difficult. There was the black dress and we drooped a bit and that was that. I guided her through the easy informalities of the tourist customs and we lunched in a pleasant restaurant I had

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marked down for her, where she squealed suddenly with delight because everything was ‘so French’. And then became meek again. I packed her and her belongings into my car and took her to Mont St. Michel where I had engaged rooms in the hotel.

‘Lovely!’ she said at the first sight of the mount, and she continued to say it at intervals along the coast road and across the sunlit causeway until our reception at the little hotel. It was quite the right expression. The sands, the blue sea, the great pile in the warm afternoon sunlight were at their best and altogether lovely. We spent the night on the island and walked out in the moonlight – ‘Lovely’, she said to the moonlit sea and ‘Lovely’ to the quite exceptionally good omelets we were given at dinner – and then we turned west again by St. Brieuc and Guingamp to Morlaix with its lovely spiral staircase and its lovely viaduct. And for four or five days I talked to her, I talked my best about everything under the sun in the firm belief that she would presently stop answering me in single words and break out wonderfully with the completest response and understanding.

I am trying to recall some of the subjects of that instructive monologue. I see now that my expectation of response was fantastic. But my need to feel that I was imposing some sort of picture of myself, my purposes and my world on someone, was so strong then as to blind me to the absurdity of what I was doing. As I look back upon it I am reminded rather disagreeably of how I sat jeering silently in the inn

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garden by the Loire while Dolores expanded herself for the admiration of Marguerite Benniel within. The parallelism may not be exact but it is disconcertingly close. I was certainly under the sway of a desire to make Lettice into a devoted daughter-disciple.

Among other topics I recall myself discoursing upon, was the green Celtic world. I tried to imagine something of that ancient order of things when it was less dangerous to journey by a little coasting ship than to travel eastward through the pathless forests and river swamps and morasses and hostilities and ambushes of the land. Ireland, Wales, Cornwall and this Breton country were then all in a thin but very real and sympathetic community. It spoke what was practically a common language; it had a common culture. Its saints and apostles came from Wales and Ireland. Rome had receded to an inaccessible distance and Jerusalem was in fairy-land. I tried to picture this forgotten world of the fifth and sixth centuries with its trading and its coming and going, its Merlin and its saints and its kings, and how gradually the Northmen from the east, the English and the Normans and later the French, pressed westward aggressively and broke up its united isolation. And I talked too of the widening breach that developed between the English and the French as the inland roads began to operate so that the Channel ceased to be a highway and became relatively a frontier, and of all the invasions and sieges and sea battles that ensued from that. Gradually as ships grew stouter and seamanship bolder, the Atlantic

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came into the story. I was struck by a realization that if there had been no Columbus, the men of Devon and the men of Brittany would still have been in America in a century or so. There would still have been French fishermen in Newfoundland and pilgrim fathers in New England. We overrate Columbus. The Irish discovered America and made it incredible the way they told about it; Canute's seamen discovered America; the Chinese and Japanese discovered America several times; the Icelanders never knew it was undiscovered; America was always being discovered, but the broad strands of a conclusive contact with North America spread out from either side of the Manche.

With such thoughts as these I regaled Lettice.

I remember, too, various attempts to picture the costumes and common events of the past at Mont St. Michel, St. Malo, St. Brieuc and elsewhere. They sounded more and more like educational radio talks as I delivered them. I tried to make the old crowds of those narrow streets live again, so like ourselves and so different. All of them driving forward towards old age and death, but almost completely unaware of any drift of change as they went about their various businesses. It is not only perspective that makes their lives seem little to us. They had no sense of fundamental change. They thought their Armorica would last for ever and it passed; they thought their dukedom of Brittany could have no end. The wars of the French and English seemed to be in the gallant nature of things, and where is that warfare now? And then

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I think I said a lot about life and the giant changes about us and what a great thing it was to be entering upon life nowadays, when it dawns upon us that we too may play a part in the unfolding of the future. I told how life had come to me and opened out before my eyes. I talked of my expectations and ambitions. I made reflections and digressions. You have had this book to read and you must know by now how abundantly I reflect and digress. I speculated about what was ahead for me in life and what was ahead for her. Where should we be in twenty years' time? What should we have done then and what should we be doing?

'I shall be thirty-nine years old then,' she said, making an arithmetical effort. 'I'll *hate* it.'

'Not so much as you think,' I said.

And meanwhile the car carried us along through the clean clear western sunshine, we stopped by the wayside to pick flowers, we descended for meals and for churches and menhirs and show places, we watched fellow travellers, we slept in prim clean little hotels. . . .

Then my faculty of observation – I first became aware that the thing was back when we were going about Morlaix – came on duty again firmly but unobtrusively. I noted a change in my manner. I was swinging slowly from a phase of self-expression about my world and my outlook and the changes and the meaning of life and so forth to my extrovert phase. I was becoming aware of what I was doing and the

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absurdity of it. For a time I went on with the previous topics very much as before, but now self-consciously, with an eye on her and with little phrases of provocation and irony creeping into my discourse. And before we got to Brest I had ceased to talk at her at all, and our intercourse varied between long silences, times when I talked aloud to myself heedless of the effect upon her, and times when I questioned her and drew her out sometimes directly and sometimes subtly about herself.

Never in my life have I had to do with such a recessive conversationalist as Lettice. She has a power of not seeing, not hearing, not heeding anything about her, that exercises me enormously. All the time she seems to be defending some hidden inner life, some secret system of standards, from the invasion of alien facts, novel suggestions, additions, extensions. At any time when she is not actually being called upon for response, she seems to lapse into reverie. When she is talked to directly, she has a way of looking thoughtful and uttering a remarkably useful word, quite new to me, 'Urm'. It parries almost anything. It is a complete rejection of further questioning. It signifies, 'I know enough, thank you'.

She stood out against the sky on a cliff overlooking Quiberon Bay. 'There,' I said, 'round that headland Hawke's fleet appeared and caught the French napping. Can't you see them sailing in?'

She looked under her hand at nothing in particular and said, 'Urm'.

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'But the British had a rough time here sixteen years later.'

'Urm,' very softly.

'There has been endless fighting here. Caesar fought a battle here, galleys against sails.'

She was plainly distressed. She hadn't another 'Urm' in stock. Why drag in Caesar? It was sufficiently difficult to look at this broad scene in the sunshine, without plastering it with three layers of invisible facts. Probably she felt she ought to look across the bay a little differently for Caesar and for Hawke and for the emigrés, and she didn't know how. It was just the same old sunlit bay. To a multitude of tourists historical associations must be an unmitigated nuisance. They are to Lettice. Every sort of association seems to bother her. 'Doesn't that boat down there look *little!*' she remarked suddenly.

'It is a little boat.'

'But it looks so teeny, — I mean.'

'It is a way little boats have. Especially when they are far off. That boat must be a mile away or more.'

'Urm.' The effort to take notice and change the subject had spent itself. She made to descend.

She has an absolute absence of curiosity about the past or the future or whatever is above or below the visible things of the present. At first I thought her tremendous irresponsiveness was due to a need she might have felt at home to defend herself against Hoopler's very difficult style of conversation. But I found that it is much more than that. She was not

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protecting any living mental process against irrelevance. She is not so to speak seeing and thinking for herself and fending off distracting direction and pompous ill-directed instruction. She is just not seeing or thinking about external things at all. They are too much for her. This world which is a feast to me, for her is the menace of a stupendous indigestion. She says 'No thank you' to all of it and reverts to something within.

Only once on this journey have I seen her roused to a vivid exterior interest. This country is laced with little old-fashioned light railways which wind about among the granite hills, and suddenly as I drove along an undulating lonely road the rocky ground about us fell away and one of these toy trains of theirs seemed to come out of the ground beside us a hundred yards or so away. It appeared trundling along quite noiselessly, except maybe for some faint rhythm of the wheels. It came out against the sky. It was a long black single car and in it were sitting, all quite stiffly, all quite noiselessly, the black and white Breton passengers. The three or four immobile men were wearing those great beribboned felt hats they have; the women, caps. Some appeared to be carrying baskets and parcels on their laps. They travelled alongside us with an air of predestination. None looked at us. They sat with an air of vacant preoccupation. They were small and very clear against the light. They were so different in quality from the automobile tourist bustle of our movement that they seemed indeed to be inhabitants of some different, some elfin world.

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Lettice did get that. ‘Oh!’ she cried, discovering them and sat up.

‘Look!’

I looked.

‘Whethy come from? Oh! Whethy *come* from?’

I thought it best for her imagination to make no explanations and slowly as our own road mounted again, the little train was swallowed up by the landscape. It sank, it vanished.

‘Whethy gone?’ asked Lettice.

‘Ssh!’ I said mysteriously.

She looked at me questioningly. ‘You’re making fun,’ she said and twisted herself round and about, and for a time she was all agog to see that fey train once more. But it followed the undulations of the land to its own little Halte and our road went with a hairpin bend or so over a hill-crest into another valley. We never saw that little railway again.

At supper that night she said apropos of nothing:

‘I wonder whethy *got* to.’

‘Who?’

‘All those funny people.’

It is the only time I have ever heard her express curiosity.

‘Weren’t they funny?’ she said. ‘Coming up like that out of the ground. I thought it was a perfect scream. So *solemn* they all were!’

I have been chary of trying to get at the hidden core of my daughter Lettice by any direct questioning. It would be as risky as rattling about with a poker in a

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dark cupboard to find an egg. But I have remarked that she is much addicted to sending post-cards. One now and then to Alice or to an old schoolfellow or so proclaiming that she is in 'La Belle France', that I could understand, an occasional spray of cheerful 'Cheeri-os'; but this is the steadfast sending of at least one card daily to one particular receiver. One evening she was lost in thought over one of these missives. She was, I suppose, thinking out some variant of the customary salutation.

'Is he really worthy of you?' I asked suddenly.

She examined my expression for a moment, coyly defensive.

'You've been reading my cards,' she said reproachfully.

'I've been reading your face.'

'Well, if you've found it out, you've found it out. . . . He's nice.'

'So that is why you are all in a dream and rather bored by Brittany, eh? What sort of young man is he?'

'He's clever.'

I had a memory of Alice explaining the high intellectual quality of Hoopler. There are moments when Lettice can be extraordinarily like Alice. This statement of '*his*' cleverness was a defiant assertion that he was going to rank with me, an anticipation of any superciliousness on my part.

'A year or so older than you?'

'It's best like that.'

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'And you adore him?'

'I keep him in his place.'

'What does he do?'

'He's in a shipping office. It's business about shipping and freights and all that. They like him there.'

'Why didn't you tell me this before, Lettice?'

'I didn't think you'd care to know somehow.'

'Does your mother know?'

'I haven't told her.'

'It hasn't been going on for long?'

She counted with her fingers on the tablecloth.  
'Five months,' she said.

'And what does Daddy Hoopler say?'

'He doesn't know anything.'

'And your mother, who knows, though you haven't told her, gave you a hint that on the whole, you'd better not say anything about this to your new adopted Daddy – for a bit.'

That question troubled her.

'It wasn't quite like that,' she said slowly.

'Of course not,' I said. 'Never mind. Well, I'm all in sympathy, Lettice. Bless you, my children. If you don't love now you never will. It gets harder and harder the older you grow. Tell me anything you like to tell me about him. Or not, as you feel disposed.'

'You *are* kind, Daddly dear,' she said looking at me almost fondly but as though she was not absolutely certain of my kindness. I smiled at her and patted her hand on the table and relaxed the tension by

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signalling to the waitress. ‘You must talk to me about him whenever you feel disposed,’ I said. ‘And not when you don’t.’

‘Of course I can’t help *thinking* of him.’

‘So natural,’ I agreed.

‘All this lovely holiday. Well, I think of him.’

‘You go about and you can’t help imagining – if perhaps he came round the corner or into the inn. . . .’

‘But how do you know that?’

‘Do I seem very old to you, Lettice?’

‘Oo! no!’

‘Well, I can remember going through all that. And it doesn’t seem so very very long ago.’ I did not foresee how soon my memory was to be refreshed. ‘You think,’ I said, ‘– if perhaps he came into this dining-room now – ’

She looked up in an instant of irrational hope and then her momentary brightness dulled. ‘And all the time,’ I said, ‘you know perfectly well he is away across the sea at Southampton.’

‘Isn’t it *silly*!’ she said.

‘It is how we are made, Lettice; it is how we are made. When does he get his holidays?’

‘Three whole days before I get back,’ said Lettice, impressively with a sudden desperate hope in her eyes.

‘We’ll arrange all that, my dear,’ I said. ‘You should have told me about this before.’ And for the rest of the evening I was amused by watching Lettice’s ingenuous efforts to conceal how happy it made her to

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think that this holiday with me was to be ended three days earlier than she had supposed. And since then we have dropped Brittany and history and so forth out of our scanty conversation altogether.

She is curiously reluctant to mention *his* name; she prefers the faint mysteriousness of speaking of him as a Certain Person; and she furnishes few definite particulars about him. But she quotes his opinions at times and his preferences and dislikes. He seems to be commonplace and average to the point of distinction. There are no signs of poetry or art or adventure or interest of any sort nor even of any great sensuousness in their relationship. Their chief excitement seems to be in just seeing each other, in expecting to see each other, in seeing each other unexpectedly (that is wonderful), in hearing about each other from other people. But maybe there Lettice exercises reserve and, hidden from me, wonderful and beautiful anticipations pursue each other through her inturned mind. Yet in that case, wouldn't these art galleries we walk through or the occasional splashes of music we encounter, have something to say to her to which she would betray some kind of response? I cannot understand this real deadness of interest – in anything. Alice was not like this anyhow. She had a bright eye for the shop-windows and hoardings of life and got what she could of what she saw advertised.

I find that every shred of my personal interest in Lettice has disappeared.

But I hear a sound in the passage of Bunningtons

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and Lettice returning from their cinema, and I think I will sally out and make them all have drinks downstairs – Ma Bunnington is always rather coy about taking a nightcap cognac and always does so – before finally turning in. To-morrow we start for our respective homes.

And I find that I have not even mentioned the strange and peculiar experience which I sat down to tell this afternoon.

I have had a shyness even with myself. It is something very difficult to tell accurately. I fell in love. The next time I write in this book I will begin with it straightforwardly and avoid all divagations.

### § 3

(*St. Malo, September 30th, 1934*)

Now, as I promised myself, I will begin *in medias res*.

What I have to tell is this. I fell violently in love. A week ago at an out-of-the-way place called Questombec outside an inn looking upon a quaint little covered market-house, I astonished myself by this amazing experience. It happened like a stroke of lightning – and I tell of it in my own despite. It has left me crumpled and disconcerted. And yet it is so unsubstantial a thing that I find it difficult to tell.

It was on the same day on which we encountered

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these Bunningtons whose tour has been interlacing with ours now for the past four or five days. I had no time to write about it in Nantes. I was coming to that and then the Bunningtons and Lettice returned from their movie. I digressed too much about St. Paul. With a sort of subconscious wilfulness I kept on about St. Paul. I did not know how to break into the topic that obsessed me. Now I can get the whole business in perspective – and moreover there is something more to tell about it that seems to round it off. This evening Lettice and I are staying in St. Malo instead of in Dinard, where the Bunningtons are wondering what has become of us, all on account of that same gust of passion. But first I must put the Bunningtons into the picture.

These Bunningtons came opportunely to ease the gathering tension between Lettice and myself. They appeared first in the dining-room of some inn before we came to Quiberon and then they did little more than look at us curiously and timidly. They were touring in a car driven by the son. There was a broad-faced mother in half-mourning, with a general air of good-humoured geniality, through which ever and again a calculating watchfulness would gleam unexpectedly, almost like a bad character peeping out of the window of a respectable-looking house; there was a rather jaded-looking son in the middle twenties in a golfing suit, and two daughters in berets and jerseys, about nineteen and sixteen. It became evident that there was trouble between the service which spoke no

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English, and the son who used that sort of home-made non-idiomatic French with a restricted vocabulary which only another Englishman can possibly understand. He was rapidly losing his temper between the perplexity of the waitress and the not very helpful promptings of his sisters. I offered my services, which were eagerly accepted by the mother and rather grudgingly by the young man.

'I could do it all right, Mother, if the menoo was written out properly,' he said.

'It's shockingly written,' I said, taking it. 'And smudged. Probably this waitress here knows less French than you do. She'd understand Welsh better.'

'I don't *know* Welsh,' said the young man.

'Why should you?' said I.

'It's these dialects that put me right off it,' said the young man, with declining resentment.

I read them the menu with an affectation of difficulty and occasional pauses for reflection, took their decisions and transmitted their orders. 'Can I help you with the wine?'

'George says we ought not to mix water with our wine,' said the elder sister, evidently reviving a smouldering controversy.

'The French do it,' I said pityingly, and added: 'At meals.'

'But better not?' appealed George.

I nodded agreement to him confidentially as one man to another.

I conveyed their instructions to the serving maid.

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'I'm sure we're much obliged to you,' said Mrs. Bunnington. 'You speak French like a native.'

'Like a commercial traveller,' I said and returned to Lettice.

'Now that's a *nice* gentleman,' I heard Mrs. Bunnington say, none too careful not to be overheard. 'I wonder who he can be. I don't know what we should have done without him.'

'I'd have managed,' said the son. 'It's easy when you know the ropes.'

But the next morning when his mother and sister were still in the inn, he did me the honour to take counsel with me about the roads to Quimperlé. 'It seems to be a place worth seeing,' he said and I made a guarded endorsement. He betrayed uneasiness when the man in the green baize apron appeared with the luggage, so I wandered off out of sight so as not to embarrass him while he packed his car, did his tipping and started up. They passed me in the little village street and I was greeted by them all in the most cordial manner, the son making the car swerve in a sort of bow to me. I found Lettice sitting at a little green table on the terrace, waiting for me with a profoundly thoughtful expression on her face.

'Friendly people,' I said.

'Urm,' she said and brooded for a bit. 'Daddly - what relation am I to you really?'

'Haven't I kind of adopted you?' I asked.

'Urm - but - .'

'Has that good lady been asking questions?'

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'Ye-ess.'

'?'

'She asked, was I your daughter? So I said, Yes. It seemed easiest. And then she asked, why was I wearing black. So I thought it best to say that was for a friend of mine that you didn't know. So as to explain you not being in mourning. And then she asked, was my mother alive? So I said Yes without thinking and then I said No. I got sort of confused. So she looked at me for a minute and said, Never mind telling me if you don't want to. But you seemed such a nice gentleman, she said, and with something sad and lonely about you, and anyhow I must be a great comfort to you. She was lonely too, she said, sometimes. You be good to him, she said – just as though I wasn't. And she kissed me and stared at me for a bit and kept waving her hand in a kind of meaning way as the car went off.'

I reflected. 'No need to bother your head about it, Lettice. They are going to Quimperlé and we are going inland and then to Nantes. I don't suppose there is much chance of our ever seeing them again.'

'I suppose we shan't,' said Lettice, 'But I thought I'd tell you.'

'Best thing to do. But don't bother yourself.'

'Only it all seems so *silly*,' said Lettice.

Fate however decided we should meet again, and at Questombec they irrupted just as we were sitting down to lunch in the little dining-room, and forthwith they were as people say, all over us. Might they join

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tables with us? Which way had we come? What had we seen? How bad and bumpy the roads were and how thirsty driving made one?

I think that on the whole, in spite of that little contretemps with Mrs. Bunnington, Lettice was glad to see them again. She was manifestly getting almost more bored with me than I was with her. After all I had mental reserves she did not possess, I could see this aquatint End of the World country in the most interesting perspectives, I could pursue my philosophical speculations within myself, I could go on with my personal problems. For her this tour was like a discourse delivered in an unknown tongue in front of a panorama of appearances that were merely 'foreign', queer, non-hilariously 'funny' or just silly. But these other young people established living points of contact with Lettice almost immediately. They came, it appeared, from somewhere in the Southampton-Portsmouth region, called Haslar, and the son either knew a Certain Person or someone else of the same name too similar to be easily distinguishable. That was very remarkable; it showed how small the world is. Bit by bit the identification was established.

But Mrs. Bunnington did not join in their exchanges. She sat herself down on my right-hand and I became aware that she was regarding me with a marked and peculiar fixity. She had an air of fending off the general talk from me in order to mesmerize me. She struggled to make me meet her eye.

She spoke in a low confidential tone. 'You know,

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you are one of those people who feel things intensely.'

'And how did you divine *that*?' I asked.

'I can see it. And sometimes it would be well for you to remember that nothing is as bad as it seems.'

'As a general rule?' I said, trying to seem intelligently interested.

'Nothing is good or bad but thinking makes it so.'

'Now that's familiar. Who said that?'

'My husband.'

'Your *husband*! I didn't imagine — '

'Mr. Bunnington was a Mind Healer,' she said. 'He began as an Osteopath but afterwards he became a Mind Healer — with Physical Exercises. Perhaps you do not know. But he was well known. He had a large practice before he passed over. He had quite a lot of distinguished men, artists and writers and that sort of man doing his neck exercises. He taught them to swan. (!?) Swan, you know — like swans. Swanning exercises. Some of them swan now quite beautifully. He was writing a book about it when he died.'

As a publisher I felt a slight recoil at this first faint menace of a manuscript. But for the moment Mrs. Bunnington was not thinking of publication.

'Let not your heart be troubled,' she said, almost in a whisper of encouragement to me. 'Neither let it be afraid.'

'Was that another of your husband's—inspirations?'

'Yes. He had many. But does it mean nothing to you?'

'Much,' I said between mouthfuls.

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'I can *see* you are under a shadow' – she glanced at Lettice, but the young people were interested in their own talk – 'and I should be so glad to be of Help to you.'

'I don't think I *am* under a shadow. No. I think I should feel it if I was. Don't you? Do you like the faint flavour of garlic in this salad?'

She brought her face closer to mine and regarded me sideways with her little cunning aggressive eyes. 'I know better,' she murmured.

'I never contradict people.' I moved a little away from her.

'I have intuitions. My husband used to say that my intuitions were often better than his science. Psychic, you know. Psychopathic. I can't help telling you things about yourself, things that you may not know yourself. You are under the shadow of a great loss. Your will is confused.'

'Did my niece there tell you that?'

'I know. I knew.'

I felt I had to get on to the defensive as quickly as possible. 'I have a certain reserve about my private feelings, Mrs. Bunnington – almost – you know – like wearing clothes.'

'But when it is a doctor!'

'When I *call in* a doctor, that is different,' I said, and then the waiter intervened to inaugurate cheese and dessert.

But Mrs. Bunnington was not so easily repulsed. She recoiled a little from the attack but only to rally

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her forces. She resumed with an account of her husband's remarkable career and practice. He was not, she said, a very big man physically but he was a very strong man indeed, of great muscular vigour and perfection, he could inflate his chest until he floated 'in the sea like a bubble', and he had come into Healing by way of being a gymnastic instructor. He had found he was able to advise people and help people. Gradually he had come to realize that the body and mind of a man, in health, were his Supreme Inheritance.

She repeated the phrase with gusto. She pressed it upon me. She evidently found it good and wanted me to savour of its full beauty. 'Man's Supreme Inheritance!'

I was tempted to comment. 'Another of your husband's original phrases, I presume? They must have been extensively quoted. It *is* certainly true,' I remarked, 'that we inherit ourselves.'

'It is the greatest truth. But do we *heed* it?' she asked with a rising inflection.

Nothing to say to that.

She resumed her story earnestly. Gradually it had dawned upon Mr. Bunnington that he possessed the gift of healing to an unusual degree and that he owed it to others as well as himself to exercise his gift. He had begun to appreciate the Psychic Side and that was where Mrs. Bunnington and her natural Psychic Gifts had come in. They had worked together. Most of the illness in the world was due, it seemed, to mental and physical maladjustment; the mind more

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often than the body was at fault. Of course few people knew how to breathe properly, few people held themselves upright properly, 'the abdomen particularly', said Mrs. Bunnington, and the way they neglected their necks was shocking. They sat down into their collars 'like turtles'. Still these were things the mind could easily correct. It was in the mind that the great difficulties lay. 'Not *altogether* in the mind, of course,' said Mrs. Bunnington. 'That is where we differ from the Christian Scientists. But *principally* the mind. . . .'

And so on. And so on. My attention wandered. I felt like a menagerie animal that is being poked at with a stick it does not want to notice.

'That is where you come in. That is why I am interested in you. An illness of the mind is creeping on you — while bodily you still seem to be in perfect health. Some reservation. . . .

'The want of someone to *tell* things to. . . . My husband used to say that was the one good of the confessional. . . .'

I sat and listened inattentively and cracked my walnuts as loudly as possible. 'Coffee?' I asked them all and said over my shoulder; 'I will have mine on the terrasse.'

The Bunnington young people had glanced ever and again at their mother as she got launched on what was evidently a familiar topic to them. Then they had turned again to Lettice and their own fragmentary talk in undertones. Now at the mention of coffee they

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said, ‘Mr. Wilbeck, what is this Saint’s Leap they talk about?’

‘An excellent sight,’ I said, addressing Mrs. Bunnington in particular. ‘It is something you ought not to miss. About half a mile through the town to the old castle and the ravine. So they tell me. An admirable after-lunch walk. It is in the Muirhead guide. Look! You must *all* go. And meanwhile I will wait here for you. There is no hurry at all to-day – ’

I stood up and went across the room to the waiter for the bill. After I had paid I walked out upon the terrasse without rejoining them and secured possession of the only chaise longue. But almost immediately Mrs. Bunnington appeared in pursuit. She drew up a tin chair that scraped horribly and seated herself beside me. She seemed primed with a premeditated discourse.

‘You are going to see the Saint’s Leap?’ I asked.

‘I want to talk to *you*.’

This was no occasion for half measures. I spoke with great firmness to her. ‘After lunch,’ I said, ‘it is my habit to let my mind lie fallow. I smoke a cigar and I like to smoke it alone. I do not like company in the afternoon. I think you will be much happier if you go with the young people.’

There was a slight pause.

‘Of course,’ said Mrs. Bunnington, still genial, though with a manifest effort and rising slowly from her chair, ‘if that is how you feel – ’

She stood over me, still slightly incredulous.

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'That afternoon snooze!' she said by way of a parting shot. 'Long before you are fifty!'

I did not answer. I had no intention of snoozing. I motioned her away.

Damn her!

### § 4

I wonder why I find this sort of quackery so irritating. Possibly because it seems to me to be making headway against all the critical and educational forces I serve. I try not to be impatient, which is the beginning of intolerance. But I ask with a sore mind, How long must the exploitation of human infantilism go on? This grand-daughter of Sludge the Medium would have liked to get all over me, and half believed in her stuff herself as she unfolded it. It exasperates me just as Dolores' trite rantings about personified races and nations, her deadly caricature of current politics, used to exasperate me. It exasperates me with a sense of ineffectiveness. Shall we never make headway against this nonsense? Does human nature insist on it?

My sort of people have done so much to shatter organized systems of religious and patriotic obsession that at times it strains my patience to the raving point to discover that instead of drying up in decent defeat these dying dragons bleed a spreading and corrosive juice. Which creeps and increases. I seem to meet more and more minds discoloured by this superstitious

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deliquescence. At every level of intelligence I meet them. The American negro escapes from the artless Evangelicalism of the camp meeting to fall to Father Divine, and up and down the scale of culture, the Fathers Divines, the gurus and guidances, the mind-healers and psychic confessors seep poisonously through the world of thought. More and more abundantly. Mrs. Bunnington is just a middle class specimen. I suppose there must be hundreds now like her.

So far as I can analyse this — this *ooze*, its essential ingredient is a natural false assumption about life. A false assumption that holds its own against us, a Proteus so flexible and persistent that maybe it will defeat us altogether. This tenacious false assumption is the belief in Perfection. It changes its shape, it is here, it is there; it is always the same. Few people get the full significance of the biological science we talk about so glibly. They do not realize that it disposes of any delusions about perfect forms and perfect health. Underdeveloped minds cling to those — ‘*ideals*’, shall we call them? The realization that life is and must be for ever a struggling maladjustment, is too difficult, discouraging, uncomfortable and frightening for them. They refuse to believe that that is how they are made; they think there must be a perfect way somewhere, a fatuous shiny *rightness*, so that, once found, they will thereafter be able to go through life in a state of eupeptic invulnerability. Only you see people have put them wrong about it and so they have missed this natural perfection.

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I suppose the doctrine of the Fall is the large scale version of this fantasy of a lost perfection.

And when the Bunningtons of their particular cultural class come along with patter about the fourth dimension, the secrets of Tibet, Will and Direction, and with their marvellous recipes for the perfect life, breathe down your backbone, digest *consciously*, waggle your abdomen this way and that, never touch meat, never touch *tinned* food, eat the *peel* of your fruit, sit vacuous for fifteen minutes every day, come and participate in my ‘aura’ (for the moderate fee of two guineas the time) they succumb. Now at last they have it. Now they too will be and feel perfectly healthy. If only they believe what guru tells them and say it over every day, ‘Every day, in every way I get better and better’ – they get better – and better. The great secret is theirs. They just drop out of the thin and wavering, suffering, thinking and fighting line that still might recondition this foundering world.

Whether they would have been any good in the fighting line I don’t know. Maybe we might just as well have left them to the old-fashioned priest before the old-fashioned altar. . . .

Manifestly the bare thought of Mrs. Bunnington puts me in a vile temper. It is a flat contradiction of my existence. It reminds me so plainly that the majority is by nature and natural disposition against my sort, and will be for ages yet. Its vanity, its hope, its will are all against the austere truth. And so Mrs. Bunnington earns her living and we are in an

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ineffective minority. To try to get one's own ideas in order, let alone those of those people, is to struggle towards isolation. . . . Is it to struggle towards anything else? . . .

But where am I drifting?

The impudence of trying that stuff on me!

Again — *damn* her!

### § 5

I sat smoking outside that Questombec inn disliking Mrs. Bunnington with unusual thoroughness and no humour in it at all, and wondering why I had drifted into such intolerable company. What was I doing, pottering about in Brittany in this fashion with a mute daughter whose only strong desire seemed to be to get away from me at the earliest opportunity? I liked driving my little Voisin car, I was interested by the sunlit stagnation of this calm backwood country, I had Dolores and much else to think about and think out before I returned to Paris and London, yet the immediate human setting into which I had stuck myself seemed extraordinarily ill-chosen and unsatisfactory. It was with difficulty I recalled the phase of acute — what shall I say? — lack of detailed stimulation rather than loneliness, that loneliness panic, which had made me send for Lettice and anticipate all sorts of impossible wonderful and companionable things about her. And after I had got her on my hands inertia had carried me on.

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And here I was at Questombec. The sunlight on the little old building across the Place and on the wooded hillside beyond was softly gorgeous. Until Lettice and the Bunningtons came straggling back, nothing it seemed could possibly happen.

I reflected upon the general conduct of my life. Was it by any chance an exceptionally haphazard life? Not as a whole. No. I had a conception of my life as a whole, I had a plan, a religion, so to speak, to which I shaped my mental and business activities, but apart from that I certainly ate, drank, went about with people, made engagements, entangled myself, mortgaged time and energy with an absence of selection and precaution and foresight that was almost complete. The casualness of my personal encounters appeared stark and remarkable before me. Since my birth people had happened to me and I had made hardly an effort to control these happenings. My household arrangements, my associations and companionships, the atmosphere I breathed, had been none of my designing. I ran over the main lines of my story, Alice, Dolores, this snatch at Lettice, my clubs and my minor associations. In the business in London and at Durthing, I did choose people, I weighed them up, watched them and considered them and promoted or got rid of them. But for the rest of my existence I steered myself almost as much as a cork in a cataract.

And — preposterous question for a man of forty-five to ask! — was this the way most people are living or was I an exceptional case of sheer heedlessness in a watchful

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scheming world? How sweepingly human life was changing about me! In its increasing heedlessness for example. In the universal decay of prescription.

In the old-fashioned 'sober' cellular life of the past there had been an air of precaution and arrangement – at least at the prosperous level of living. People confined their intercourse to those to whom they had been 'introduced'; young people were counselled to be wary in the choice of friends. You married in your class. You knew what to expect. The best society behaved and even misbehaved to pattern. All that sort of thing I reflected had been breaking down long before the war; the war had merely accelerated and completed the social dissolution. The old classes lost what was left of their definition and the new sorts of people that appeared had been too various to develop new ruling conventions and common ways of behaviour.

I had certainly lived at loose ends and here and there, very wilfully, but I doubted if my detached ménage with Dolores had been anything so very peculiar by modern standards. More and more of us are odd men out and odd women out. A hundred years ago, I told myself, a man in my case would as a matter of course have been laboriously hunting, which bored me because I did not ride well – and which would have bored me even then – shooting which disgusted me, dining out stiffly, giving dinners – dinner parties rather – going to 'the' opera, 'the' play, decorating a fairly prolific wife with diamonds or pearls and worrying about a title. Midday at the club.

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There you had a made world ready for anyone who escaped from toil and poverty – as ‘made’ as the horses people trot about on in the Parks – and setting a pattern to which the hopeful and struggling might aspire.

But nowadays that old formal world had not so much died as become an unburied phantom. The most tenacious thing about it I reflected was the butler. The stately homes of England were manifestly astonished at the young people who have inherited them. The great houses were more and more show places; the furniture stood aloof even from its rightful owners. The Edwardians had startled that furniture a lot and reinforced it from Tottenham Court Road but they had kept their clothes on in public. Only the furniture had known. The new generation kept nothing on – except the butler who would have kept on anyhow. The new men nowadays – and there were more and more new men – were not assimilated to anything. The successful business men, I knew, even the very rich ones, lived in households that were as much misfits and makeshifts as mine had been, as much improvisations as mine. And their ladies, those incalculable female accidents!

Only in a world of people made to pattern was a stable social life possible. And even then at the price of endless suppression and hypocrisy. Nowadays we were all different, there was practically nothing to prevent our being different, we diverged daily and went our ways, and with only the vaguest ideas of

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what we wanted in the nature of associates until they happened to us. Whereupon we realized that they were wrong.

Alice of course was not so very wrong. For a natural young man who could have stayed at home with her and kept her straight. Alices have happened to endless men and the association has proved endurable. I had met her by chance and parted from her because so it fell out. But in most cases the Alices are not wrong enough to bring the discord to a crisis. She had been just normally wrong. Dolores seemed a rarer sort of discord, but was she? I had tolerated her wrongness for thirteen years – to the end of her life. She had invaded me; she had made the most strenuous efforts to assert her harsh unloving and unlovely femininity against me, until at last we had got to a desperate struggle for the upper hand. How many couples in the world now were carrying on a similar struggle! With us our discordance had in the end become stark and murderous because we had not had the mitigation of children. But even with children the essential antagonisms of the casually matched must surely appear – might even for all I knew become even more evil, because of the possibility of enlisting those poor little accidents as auxiliaries in the domestic warfare. Fantastic paradox it was of human life that we were in perpetual flight from loneliness and perpetually seeking relief and escape from the connections that ensued. . . .

My meditations had reached some such point as this,

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when I became aware of a young woman approaching me across the Place. She was tallish, blonde, sunburnt, hatless, in a light-brown tweed suit that had a peculiar quality of rightness about it, and her gloveless hands were stuck in her jacket pockets. She was looking about her as though something about the Place and the inn puzzled her and at the same time amused her. She had a broad forehead above her frank blue eyes, her hair waved back from it with an unassisted grace and her lifted chin showed an extremely pretty neck. There was a touch of warmth in her fairness, it was golden hair she had, not flaxen, and later when she was nearer I noted that she had been lightly powdered by the sun with faint gold freckles. And without doubt and instantly, I realized that nothing so lovely had ever come into my life.

She stopped short outside the inn and considered it for a moment. Then her eyes came down to the terrasse level and she regarded me with a swift scrutiny that ended in approval. She seemed to have a question on her lips. I stood up.

‘You are looking for somebody?’

‘There was a car standing here,’ she said, and her full low voice was as lovely as the rest of her. ‘There was a chauffeur. There was an old gentleman. There was a nurse.’

‘You left them here?’

She surveyed the Place. ‘Unless this town is twins,’ she said.

‘They have not been here for two hours. Or let us

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say an hour and three-quarters. I have lunched and smoked – you see there is not an inch of cigar left.' I threw the stump away with the air of a man who prepares for chivalrous action. 'The only cars are that ill-mated couple parked over there.'

She glanced at the cars and found they did not help her problem.

Then a voice came out of the house behind me.  
'Oh, miss. He's been so *naughty*.'

For an instant I thought it might be a personal denunciation, a most unjustifiable one. I turned and discovered an English nurse, all white and proper. But she pointed no accusing finger at me. She spoke past me to the lovely young woman.

'He *would* go to bed.'

The young lady did not seem to be very greatly shocked. 'He ought to be spanked,' she said.

'You *try* it, my dear,' said a second voice and a cheerful little white-haired old gentleman appeared behind the nurse. He was small, horsey and fresh-coloured and he had decidedly handsome features. He was quite credibly the girl's grandfather. He seemed entirely satisfied with himself.

'I went to bed between sheets,' he said. 'I am *always* going to do it – every afternoon. Wherever I am.'

'Where is Wilkins and the car?' asked the young woman of the nurse.

'He goes off. Oh! – I remember. He said something about oiling something.'

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The little old gentleman addressed himself to me.  
'A man of over sixty who doesn't sleep after his lunch  
is a fool. I am eighty-two.'

'You don't look it,' I said automatically.

'And if you sleep,' he continued, 'why not *really*  
sleep? Eh? Why sleep stuffy in your clothes? Why  
make a sort of half sleep of it, with your clothes con-  
stricting you? Eh? A man who does that at my age is  
a fool.'

'Much more refreshing,' I said, racking my brains  
for some excuse to drag in the young woman.

'Much. Not the same thing at all. Every day now  
I contrive to have a room and get between the sheets.  
Every day. They try and prevent it. But'—triumphant  
crow in his voice — 'I do it.'

'You wouldn't like doing it nearly so much if it  
didn't put out Miss Stuart,' said the young lady.

'Put her out indeed. She's just one of these  
Dont-ers! Put her out! I wish I could put her out,  
confound her!'

Miss Stuart suddenly took it into her head to con-  
fide in me by an intimate smile that she wasn't really  
put out at all. She herself had a very agreeable face  
and plainly both she and the good-looking young lady  
loved that fortunate little old gentleman.

'Where's Wilkins, I say? Ah, here he is — just  
saving his bacon as usual. Pay the bill, my dear, pay  
the bill. Why haven't you paid the bill? We'll get  
there all right for dinner.'

I saw with helpless exasperation the missing

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Wilkins arrive noiselessly in a large grey Hispano Suiza. He and the nurse set to work arranging some cushions – evidently for the old gentleman. And at the same time the young lady went into the restaurant with a business-like air to settle her account. I felt myself intolerably unresourceful. The moments flew by and I did nothing. At last belatedly and feebly I said to the old gentleman: ‘Have you far to go?’

‘Twenty. Thirty. *I* don’t know. Wilkins there does the sums. We’ve oceans of time. Oceans.’

‘Now, Sir,’ said the nurse.

The young lady gave me a nod and a pleasant smile. I was so concerned with getting some shadow of an exchange between us that I did not think of observing any names or marks of identification at all, I did not even look at the number plate and in a few moments the three were tucked in comfortably, Wilkins was swinging the car round the corner, and they had gone.

And instantly I was overwhelmed by a sense of irreparable loss.

I could not endure the thought that they had gone. It was as though a great light had been extinguished. The sunshine became just painted sunshine.

They were to arrive in ‘ample time for dinner’. Now where would that dinner be? I sat down and opened out my Michelin map. I would not admit the possibility that some private house might swallow them up. That was unbearable. I decided they must be going to La Baule. I had not visited La Baule but

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I knew it was a fashionable and rather expensive bathing resort. My best chance of seeing her again lay in taking up my quarters there and using my eyes.

'*Dad-dly dear,*' came the voice of Lettice advancing across that deserted and empty Place. 'The Saint's Leap was *lovely*.'

The Bunningtons were all about me.

'Are you taking the inland road for Nantes?' asked the son. 'I don't like these minor tracks. I can't let her *out*.'

'*We're* not going to Nantes,' I said. 'At least not directly. We are going to La Baule. Where we can have a swim perhaps.'

'But you *said* you were going to Nantes,' protested Mrs. Bunnington, quite unabashed.

'*Later*,' I corrected politely. . . .

They went to Nantes and I, for the sake of another glimpse of a golden young woman, whose status I did not know, whose name even I did not know, drove to La Baule, stayed two nights there, bathed three times, made Lettice bathe — she swam I found rather well and I thought the better of her — wandered along the Esplanade, walked up to the golf links, went into the Casino, came out of the Casino, went into the Casino again, prowled to and fro before the Hermitage Hotel, visited the cocktail bar several times, went peering round the chairs and tents of the bathers sitting out upon the beach. It dawned on me that I was behaving more like a lost dog than a human being and that poor

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Lettice was having as thin a time as a dog whose owner is trying to lose it.

I pulled myself together. This fantastic thread had to be cut. 'I'm tired of this place,' I told Lettice suddenly, and in the later afternoon we went on to Nantes and rejoined the Bunningtons at their hotel. Yet even at Nantes I kept expecting that healthily slender young figure to appear at every corner. And that is why I was glad to distract my mind from its obsession by writing again and why I turned my attention to an imaginative extension to Brittany of the Journeyings of St. Paul. And why afterwards I wrote in such a strain of depreciation about Lettice.

But now to-night — it is already past midnight — I find I can write the complete story of this strange aberration of a respectable and public-spirited publisher.

I have seen my slim goddess again; this afternoon. And again she has vanished no whither, as goddesses will.

I was driving along the road from Ploermel to Dinard. I was driving rather fast because I like to keep well ahead and out of sight of the Bunningtons. I have a curious feeling that if the Bunnington car breaks down, as it always seems likely to do, and I have to help or pretend to help that ungracious young man — and if I find myself with a wrench or the handle of a jack in my hand — something might happen to make me lose my self control. I might find irony insufficient and break his head. Lettice is to take the Southampton

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boat at St. Malo to-morrow and she wanted to spend her last night in France at Dinard with these new friends of hers. I had fallen in with that idea because of a secret compunction I feel about her, not because of anything I have done to her but because of my private criticisms of her. And as we hummed along the road in the afternoon sunshine a large grey Hispano Suiza came up from behind us and requested us in a firm but kindly note, to give way to it. And there she was passing me!

She was driving. She was doing I suppose about seventy-five to eighty kilometres, and Wilkins, who sat beside her, did not appear to be in the least apprehensive about it. Her attention, as it should be, was on the road and she was totally unaware of me. She passed me.

Whereupon this strange desire for her returned to me with even greater force than before. Although it is against all the laws of nature that a rather travelled Voisin Fourteen should chase and overtake a big Hispano Suiza, kept in the pink of condition by Wilkins, nevertheless I set myself to do as much. ‘*You are going fast!*’ said Lettice.

‘Such a lovely road,’ said I.

But the grey car increased its distance continually. Now it would be lost in a series of bends. I record that though I drove fast I was still sane enough not to take my corners to the public danger. Then down a long stretch I could see her car ahead going so steadily that it seemed to be going slowly. It would sink down into

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the ground and reappear mounting a hill beyond. It would strike a soft section of road and make itself conspicuous by a long roll of dust. Ahead of us was a fork. The grey car took the road to the right and vanished.

'That's Dinard!' cried Lettice. 'To the left. I saw it on the milestone thing.'

'I know,' I said, without relaxing. 'But we're going for a little round first. Or else we shall be in Dinard *hours* before they overtake us. And I want to see if the change of date of your ticket in St. Malo is in order.'

For my guess now was that after dropping grandfather and nurse, my young divinity was returning to England *via* St. Malo. At Questombec I had not even observed whether the Hispano Suiza had an English or a French number plate though I had inferred from the fact that Wilkins was English, that it was probably of English domicile and register. This time I had retained just enough of my senses to confirm that conclusion. The number plate that was ahead of me carried a big G.B. St. Malo seemed a fairly good guess, therefore, St. Malo and home. At two turnings beyond Dinan her dust had subsided and the road was too traffic-worn to give any indication which road she took. I did not get out to look. I did not even know the pattern of her tyres. So under pretence of verifying some inexplicable point about Lettice's ticket I went on to St. Malo, and there I searched the place and found no sign of the grey car or its driver.

I tried to think out some alternative.

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Had she perhaps gone to Paramé? She might have friends staying there. Was Cancale a possible place for her? I went to Paramé and asked about the grey car at one or two roadside garages, but they had seen nothing of it.

'Are we going to Dinard now?' asked Lettice.  
'It's - evening.'

'I'm getting a little bit doubtful of the way,' I lied, and I drove on to Cancale, and came back here in the twilight at last reluctantly.

By that time Lettice seemed to realize that she was in the grasp of the incomprehensible and made no further comments.

I went through a parade of surprise and incapacity at discovering what I knew already perfectly well, that St. Malo is cut off from Dinard by a broad arm of the sea and that there was no getting the car across. I did not suggest and Lettice did not think of suggesting, that we might leave the car on this side and visit the Bunningtons for that last feast of fellowship by one of the omnibus launches that ply across the water. And here, therefore, after a final prowl in search of a large grey car, I am writing about it all now, and Lettice has gone early to bed so as to be fresh for the crossing and is, I hope, dreaming of meeting a Certain Person to-morrow....

And thus in all human probability ends the astonishing episode of that Lovely Young Woman all spotted with gold. In notes of exclamation. And I am left to make what I can of my behaviour.

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### § 6

I have tried to tell all this exactly as it has happened and while it is still fresh in my memory. It cuts diametrically across the account I have given of myself thus far and that is why I feel bound to set it down. I want to see myself in black and white in all my inconsistency.

What seized me? What was it jerked me like a hooked fish out of my pose of ironical and indeed rather sulky self-control? Why did I become suddenly like a child chasing a sunbeam? What did I really want? What did I expect?

I cannot sleep to-night and I cannot write properly. Just this minute I have gone to the window to look out – for a big grey car in the moonlight in a side street leading nowhere!

This is a preposterous state of affairs. If I am to retain control of myself I must think this out – write it out rather. Why is my brain behaving like this? What, I repeat, do I really want?

It is, I suppose, a sexual impulse that has flung me about in this fashion, but it is a very sublimated sexual impulse. I just want to see more of that lovely thing and to be with that lovely thing. I want her presence in my life so vividly, that everything else recedes into the background and seems by comparison of no importance at all. There is no detail in my desire; it is like a desire for a bright glow. (Was I not reproaching

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Lettice a few pages ago for the exact parallel to this featureless obsession?) And the curious thing in my own case is that I do not remember that in my adolescence or my young manhood, I ever felt quite this same concentration upon an individual. I have known something of desire in the past but nothing with this exclusive commanding power. Is this how it takes one as one grows up? It seems against all fact and reason that desire should be stronger at five and forty than at five and twenty, but I suppose it is natural that it should be more selective. This is not even desire for a woman; it seems altogether divorced from any physical craving, it is a passionate going out to a particular loveliness for its own sake.

Now is that all that has to be said about it? I think not. If I try to push this wordless impulsion aside I do think I can distinguish other things behind it. That girl is not simply a lovely thing in herself, but she has caught me in a phase in which everything has conspired to throw her up in relief, as a symbol of something — a lost world in which I might be and am not living. It is this that has given solidity to the glimpse of her. Because from first to last all I have had of her is a glimpse, a suggestion. She came smiling, clothed in the afternoon sunlight, just as I was deep in self-pity at my essential and apparently irremediable loneliness. Just when I was most acutely aware of the frequent dullness and discordance of my everyday life she came. Just when I was full of the lucklessness of all my intimate encounters and particularly of the wasted

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years with Dolores. Nothing could have been more apt.

It was not merely that she drew me by the natural magic that has made men pursue individual women since the race began. My pursuit of her was also a flight, from what I am and what is about me, from my confusedly frustrated self, to unimaginable things.

In a sense, as a real person, she was never there at all.

Because – and here I see I am getting at something – the truth is that for these past days of distraught behaviour I have been in pursuit of a glimpse not of a human being but of a goddess. That goddess chose to cast her cestus about a very charming young woman, but it was the goddess who bewitched me. It was Aphrodite herself who saw fit to remind me that even in everyday sunlight, this universe has something profounder and intenser than its everyday events. I perceive I have had as much of a vision as any of the saints. But of a different divinity.

Quite evidently I shall never see that brave-looking young woman again. And as evidently it is altogether undesirable that I should ever see her again.

Here and now my sanity returns to me and I declare I do not want to see that girl again.

For what would have happened if I had managed to strike up an acquaintance with these people? Within a few hours the goddess would have slipped away beyond recall and I should have been left talking, very much in love, no doubt, with a nice limited human

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being, at least a score of years my junior, very up-standing and with very definite and probably very different ideas of how life had to be lived. Let me face the facts. That is how it would have been. That broad forehead and those straight eyes spoke of an independent reason and will. How far was she educated? How far had she been ill-educated? And maybe I should have won her, for love can compel love, and before we knew where we were we should have begun that subtle and tortuous conflict of individualities to which all who belong to the new world are doomed.

We should have married and have had children no doubt. For to that end it was that old Nature who is the mother of everything, sent her daughter Aphrodite, to lure and intoxicate me. And while my handsome young wife had children, I, who was already twenty years ahead of her, would have gone on working and my ideas and ambitions would have gone on growing, while she would have been just sufficiently handicapped not to keep step with me. I should have loved her always; I am quite sure of that; and Mother Nature's short ends would have been well served; ten thousand threads of dearness would have been spun between us; but it would not have been what I was promised, nor what my heart leapt out to meet in the Place of Questombec. I should have felt as I saw her domesticated that I, and Nature, had tricked her, as she and Nature had tricked me, with something that blazed gloriously only to vanish. Surely it must be one of the essential tragedies of the intricate life we

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lead to-day, to love a woman still and remember how once one loved her.

Better I should never have another glimpse of her.

And all the same I want her and my heart frets at my own rationalization. Wherever I go and whatever I do I realize that girl, who is really not herself but the masquerade of an eternal and unattainable goddess, is going to be just round the corner, just down the glade, in the next room. . . .

It is already three o'clock in the morning. I shall have a sleep and then when day has come I shall get up, take Lettice as I have promised, round the grey walls of St. Malo and conduct her aboard the Southampton boat and kiss her good-bye. And off she will go three days earlier than the happy young couple planned, to a Certain Person.

And then – Paris.

## CHAPTER VII

### RETURN TO EVERYDAY

(*Paramé, October 1st, 1934*)

#### § 1

AN hotel room in Paramé looking out on the sea in the full tide of the bathing season may seem a strange place for a man in great perplexity about his life, to do his thinking in. But it seemed as good as any other accessible place, unless I turned back and went to Portumere to talk to Foxfield. But some of this stuff I want to straighten out in my mind is not quite in Foxfield's key. I saw Lettice off yesterday, intending to go back in the evening to Paris. I started indeed for Paris and so to speak fell into this hotel. I was full of discordant ideas and in no mood for driving. I thought I might as well have things out with myself here as anywhere.

The background of beach life outside is very pleasant. I like the softly soughing sea. It is in one of its bluest moods. Its minute white breakers are almost exactly in line with the beach. I like the distant clamour of semi-transparent pink limbed children and rather opaquer white nurses. I like the little striped

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tents. I like the reflections of people on the wet sand. It is rare one looks out on a scene with so little malice in it.

### § 2

What I want to do is to get this sex-beauty drive and this craving for close and peculiar individual intimacy that troubles me, into something like a rational relation to my life as a whole. This spasm of irrational love is not going to be my last by any means. I have been rocketing about Brittany, a nascent widower, remembering Dolores by fits and starts and then completely forgetting everything about her except that I am free from her, and vaguely but inordinately set upon a girl not half my age. Apparently that particular fever is subsiding – subsiding as inexplicably as it arose – evaporating – but now I know my vulnerability.

It becomes plain to me that for the past thirteen years Dolores has played the rôle – I can hardly think of a metaphor – of a zareba, let us say, a zareba of spiked sounds, against such raids of prowling imaginative passion. Her way of filling that rôle was occasionally ungracious, but now taking the whole situation together, it seems to me I may have been ungrateful in not recognizing how her exacting passions and her passionate jealousy, the distraction of her thorny clamour, shepherded me to my work and made any serious divagations impossible.

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But this little affair opens my eyes to my changed circumstances. Her death is altering me chemically, and imagination is an endocrinal affair. This sort of whirlwind is more than likely to spin out in me again. How am I going to deal with the next one and the next and the next after that?

Life so far, has happened to me. So I realize. What do I mean to let happen to me, when again someone takes on the quality of a commanding loveliness or an unendurable desire? In a couple of decades or so these impulses may die down, people say they die down, but until then they are likely to recur. They are in the chemistry of my nature, in my blood and bone. How far am I going to resist them, mitigate them, cheat them or give way to them? How far can I? And entangled with this urgency that lurks in my being and may pounce upon me at any time, deeper and subtler there stirs a continuing unsatisfied craving for personal intimacy and association with someone who must be essentially (and sexually) mine. . . .

Both these sets of urgency are quite explicable as old Nature's way of working me up for her chief concern, it seems, about human life, marriage and children. But the extravagant growth of the human brain, the strange accentuation and implementing of thought by words and symbols, about which I talked to that pony at Torquéstol, has outdistanced the barbs and spurs of Nature, and we find ourselves detaching her cravings and urgencies more and more definitely from the ends that justified their evolution. We want

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loveliness for itself, we want companionship for ourselves. We see beyond the bait of the trap, we nibble away most of the bait, and we refuse to be lured and cheated and to have our hearts frustrated for a mere biological purpose which we did not clearly foresee.

Old Nature has given neither adult men nor adult women any natural and enduring instinct for offspring or for the toil of sustaining a household, and she has proved quite unable to prevent our brains running away with us to remoter interests and strange and elaborated imaginings. It is old tradition and social custom that has made men and women submit to the domesticated life in the past, but how carelessly and easily they abandon it! And the further they age beyond adolescence the less easily are they brought back to it. Old Nature finds herself confronted by reproachful and horrified statisticians, figures of falling birthrate in hand, proving her lures and cheating impotent.

I look into myself and it is plain that if ever now I have a wife and a household and children it will be not because I want them directly and simply but out of some complex of highly intellectualized motives, duty to society, pride of race, refusal to commit a biological suicide. It will be an arrangement. I will marry; I will not be married by instinct. If I want children I will find a woman who wants children. I dream of a companion and loveliness, but that does not mean a woman preoccupied with a kitchen and nursery. I have no emotional desire for children at all,

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but that may be a transitory flatness due to my disappointment with Lettice. I think, however, it is more than that. I am persuaded that I belong to a newer kind of human being which comes of age not at one-and-twenty but after forty and when the pairing time is over. And also I realize that the accidents of life have a little cheated me.

The war and my divorce from Alice and my thirteen years of sterile marriage with Dolores have made me miss out a natural phase. Possibly for eight or nine years round about twenty-two for a girl and round about twenty-eight for a man, there is an effective pairing and breeding state of mind, a 'primary adult' phase of psychology, I will call it, which we live through in a decade or so. Old Meredith, the novelist, realized this. He suggested decennial marriages thirty years ago. Our world is all too apt to assume that forty-five has nothing but a slight numerical difference from twenty-five. But at forty-five I suggest that an increasing number of people are primary adults no longer, we are secondary adults, we have got to a new level, even if as yet we do not know how to live on it; and that naive susceptibility to desire and tradition has become entangled and defeated in an intricate network of critical qualifications and fastidiousness. The instinctive life, which was once the whole life of man, is now becoming for many of us only a phase of living. When I was in my teens there were mates for me by the thousand, when I was in my twenties there were mates by the hundred,

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when I was in the thirties there were still plenty of mates, but the maturer we are, the less plastic and the more definite we become. Already the current half-adult human being, I perceive, does not readily pair. That fully adult human being towards whom destiny moves, will not pair at all.

So things seem to me. I think that mentally and biologically, if not in his physical form, man has been changing for at least the last two thousand years and that now he is changing very rapidly indeed. This New Adam, *Homo rampant*, who is dawning upon us, will be a longer-lived and mentally more consistent and substantial creature than his emotional myth-thinking ancestors and brothers. His vision will be broader and longer and continually less completely ego-centred. Mutations of my sort, have at the best but half-emerged to that, we have half-emerged from a life of vividly self-conscious individuality in comparatively small communities (individuality which is mature at one-and-twenty and of no further account in the forties) to a life of a broader, more impersonal, more prolonged and more closely intra-correlated quality. Begetting and bearing a family may be only a pre-adult phase in that ampler life, and for the fully grown there may be no permanent marrying nor giving in marriage.

New social institutions may secure the perpetuation of the species quite effectively without centring themselves upon the cradle in the home. But quite certainly Mother Nature, who does not care to have

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evolution taken out of her hands, will dissent. She is dissenting now, and the stress of this conflict of impulses I find in myself is just her obstinate resistance to a new order that is passing out of the control of her slow, cruel hit-or-miss methods. She will see to it that we are troubled endlessly, and we have to save ourselves from her and trick her and assuage her as we can.

Which, to make rather a leap in the argument – for Nature, interfering as ever, tells me that dinner time is passing – is why I shall have to harden my mind to renounce both the idea of a romantic love adventure that still haunts it, and the hunger for a single close companion that has always lurked in the background of my expectations.

There are no such things for me now, there are no such things. It was just Nature's playful superfluous teasing.

### § 3

I used to think that what I call my 'work' was to save civilization – by a series of publications, an encyclopaedia or so and the start of an educational renaissance! All these things are necessary by the way, and they are as much or more than I and my sort can cope with. 'One step enough for me,' says the hymn. But they are not going to 'save Civilization'. Not a bit of it. They are steps that have to be taken, but they are not steps towards the salvaging of civilization. (I forget whose phrase that is; it sounds familiar; one of my various authors may be responsible, manifestly he

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meant well, but it is not the precise right phrase. It suggests a sort of rescue of old masters from a burning country house.)

Civilization as we know it, is not to be salvaged. It is not worth salvaging. There were some pretty things about it but its patterns are played out. It comes to an end – it tears and rends into warfare by a senile enlargement of its own traditions. All ideas of stability come to an end in the current decadence. It is high time it was recognized that we liberal moderns are salvaging nothing: we are only preparing for something, something altogether new. Escaping from the ruins is quite a different business from bolstering them up.

Man has tried hard to settle down under his own vine and fig tree for some thousands of years – in vain. If he is to survive now, plainly he has to drop this idea of secure sedentariness and turn back to nomadism, a new, eternally progressive nomadism, nomadism on a higher level, nomadism not in a caravan but alone, alone you may say or with all the world as companion and with all the planet at least as his wilderness-territory to go wherever he desires.

We, all of us, the most creative, the most progressive, are merely looking forward as yet to this new post-human life, the next act in the drama of change. We get ready for it. That is the general shape of our lives.

Before that new nomadism arrives we shall be out of the way – all our generation – which is just as well

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because, through no fault of his own, that new incessant nomad would humiliate us into the bitterest hatred and awaken the heart of malice in all of us. We should hate the wide strides of his untethered feet. We limp and hop.

We are, as I say, evolving like amphibians from one way of life to another, our heads emerge into progress but our hearts respond to tradition. We must come to terms with our own insufficiency. We find ourselves in a three-fold quandary between brain, egotism and heart. Our newly implemented reasoning powers, under the menace of extinction, urge us to organize and create; our ancient irrational instinct is not for creation and co-operation but for power, it is far more destructive than constructive; and what our poor hearts desire, hardly daring to ask for loveliness, is the happiness of play and restful entertainment. I want to look on at life and laugh at it and even love it a little. Plainly the best recipe for a working compromise with life must be to obey our reason as far as we can, play our rôle that is to say, sublimate or restrain our deep-seated instinct for malicious mischief, and gratify what we can of our heart's desire, so far as and in such manner as, our consciences approve. . . .

### § 4

To-morrow I head for Paris.

To what do I return? To a completely and deliberately companionless life. And to this 'work'

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which I make a sort of justifying refrain to my life.

What, after all, does this work of mine amount to?  
Let me get down to that.

I am just upon forty-six now and I perceive plainly that I have never yet worked steadfastly and continuously at all. I have lived in alternating phases. My life has been an affair of bright starts and interruptions and I know now surely that it can never escape from these fluctuations. It is a hybrid life, torn in opposite directions. I have imagined that I have found a sustaining objective in my publishing and educational work, that thereby I am really helping to evoke an efficient Mind of Man, and though that is partly true, partly it is only a consolation fantasy. I have told myself that I am helping to build an ark for the human mind, but that ark-building is a gigantic proposition and I doubt if I am even a foreman riveter on the immense hull such an ark needs to be.

The Mind of Man — making a great Ark for the Mind of Man? These sound preposterously ambitious phrases and yet how else can I convey my idea of what mankind needs in order to arrest disintegration and defeat? This business becomes more and more real and commanding to me as my life matures, and I think it is even more foolish to write about it in a tone of mock incidentalness than to abash myself by grandiose expressions. Because one is not poet enough to convey the greatness one feels, it does not follow that the thing one feels is not great. To be nervous and

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apologetic about one's fundamental beliefs is rather after the fashion of Mr. Toots and his 'It's of no consequence'. This is of consequence. This that I call my work, my business, is the basic system of my life, however poorly I may state it and however trivial my actual performance may be.

'Ark' when I reconsider it is rather an unsatisfactory metaphor. It suggests something shaped, rigid and final, like a creed or a constitution. 'Come aboard and all will be well.' That misinterprets me. It revives that notion of 'salvaging' something I have been criticizing. Let me try again to tell myself exactly what I mean to myself.

I am, I realize, muddy-minded. My mind is not comprehensive enough and it is too congested by minor issues and impulsions, to take a clear view of existence. It is encumbered like a crystal trying to form in a magma loaded with irrelevant matter. But nevertheless it has a considerable apprehension of potentialities. The shape of the crystal, the form of this world is perceptible to me. It is the common lot to be muddy-minded; I am muddy-minded, you are muddy-minded, he is muddy-minded; past, present and future indicative you can conjugate it; nevertheless I believe, that by getting numbers of people to think as hard as they can and state as clearly as they can, and then by bringing their results together, gradually, steadily, a clearing-up is possible. That clearing-up is going on even now but it might go on much faster. Philosophers, teachers, editors and publishers – for I

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rank all these servers-up of ideas together – should be the ushers of the crowd. That is what a publisher should be; that is all a sane philosopher pretends to be. . . .

When a substance which has been loaded and opaque, crystallizes and becomes clear and definite in its form, thrusting the alien stuff aside, it is because its particles have fallen into place one with another. Nothing new has come, nothing that was not already there, but only a better arrangement has been made.

I believe that a just general idea of a new life for mankind is existent – latent – amidst the confusions of our time, and that as it emerges to lucidity, it will have compelling power in the measure of its lucidity. In spite of my experience of Dolores, I do not think that the average human is incurably perverse. Malignant, yes, often, but not continually, and capable moreover in most cases of a certain limited amount of reversal. As the Right Thing to Do becomes patent, we shall fall into our rôles. With much grumbling and whimsicality and resistance no doubt, and with a dwindling amount of overt and secret disobedience, but we shall do it. We shall learn to detect and shoot potential Dictators and that sort of nuisance, more and more promptly. The mental atmosphere will be less and less favourable to them. It is common sense to kill them. It is common sense that *will* kill them. Better a blood-bath of dictators than a single baby blown to pieces. Human life is at sixes and sevens to-day and in perpetual danger,

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simply because it is mentally ill-arranged. To help set ideas in order is therefore the very best work one can do in the world. And in oneself. That is my master idea, my religion and to the best of my poor ability I subserve my activities to that. Imperfectly because, as I say, I am imperfectly adapted, a transitional form.

### § 5

The nature of human intimacy is changing. I must talk about that to Foxfield when I have a chance. It is certainly changing from generation to generation. There will be more better-adjusted people in the next generation – profiting by our efforts. I am only beginning to realize that.

The way creatures *contact* one another can change. Let me try and explain what I am getting at in that. How does a dog contact its fellows? Touch, not very accurate achromatic sight, rich abundant smell, sex as a transient storm; what else is there that reaches from dog to dog? Our contacts are fuller than that. And they are becoming subtler and more abundant. Ages ago man began to elaborate life by using definite words. Also he began to clothe and elaborate love. He became more companionable. By words especially. Lovers talk and weave a thousand fancies. Words become the mechanism of a vast abundance of suggestion and enrichment. We smell each other's minds in conversation. And man's eyes also become more

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exact. We see with a new precision and discover beauty. We harmonize. We recede a little from the elementary contacts in order to achieve other and wider and lovelier ones. We are reluctant to recede from those elementary contacts, because of the extravagant expectations with which they allure us, but we must. We love the mind that speaks to us in music, we find beauty in pictures, we respond to the wisdom or to the caress in a poem. We love the woman Leonardo loved and writers who were bodily dead centuries ago live on to stir us. Our contacts stretch out more and more beyond the here and the now.

When I was happy in Rennes that first day, the faint flavour of intimacy with those who had planned and built the old place was a part of my happiness. My thanks to them passed like a scarce perceptible enhancement of the evening sunshine. And when I plan and publish books — or write this stuff I am writing now — I do that also for an unseen intimate. Someone whom I hope I shall never meet to quarrel with, or disappoint, or experience his or her everyday inadequacy, will read this. Maybe human intimacy is escaping from the prison of the present and the visible, the prison of our current life, unlocking the door but still using the old cell for sleeping and eating. We'll still love sights and sounds and desire pretty people, but lightly and transitorily, not cruelly and insatiably, and our invisible tentacles will stretch through time and space to an altogether deeper and different fellowship.

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A man who sits in a quiet room reading or writing, listening or thinking, may seem to be solitary and isolated. But in fact he is in contact with myriads of intimates. He has a thousand intimacies, each closer and a thousand times finer than those of a peasant with his wife or with his dearest boon companions. . . .

So that in reality I am not solitary and I am not going to be solitary. And if perhaps I feel solitary, the feeling is a part of my transitionalness. It is because that pervading common brain, of which I am a contributory part, has not yet gathered sufficient substance about me. . . .

### § 6

It was Foxfield who said to me once that conscious life was 'the thinnest and flimsiest of pellicules, strained midway between the atoms and the stars'. Our personalities are by nature and necessity superficial. And incidental. The very saints nod and forget. Our superficiality and incidentalness seem to be inescapable. There is no coherent plot for the personal life; there may be no coherent plot for the whole. That too, like the ego, may be a delusive simplification. And yet there is something real going on, something not ourselves that goes on, in spite of our interpretations and misconceptions. That ultimate reality behind the curtains may be fundamentally and irresolvably multiple and intricate and inexplicable,

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but it goes on. It may be altogether incomprehensible to our utmost faculties, but it is there. And in some partial and elusive way we are not simply borne along by that, but we belong. We do not *happen* to exist. It is, for inexplicable reasons, our business to exist.

This I admit is unadulterated mysticism, but I have never objected to mysticism when it was unadulterated. It is when the medicine men try to conjure with it and sell it in packets that I object.

In this mystery of life there is no simple complete failure. We lapse but also we can resume. There is success in every life. It is as inevitable as defeat. Our essential success is a matter of more or less, and lies wholly in the way we respond to life. There is no Heaven for us anywhere, at any time; nevertheless there are many bright reflections and much amusing incident upon the surface of being, and there is loveliness and truth in its substance.

These are not mere words — because words can be defined by other words. But truth and loveliness are primary things. . . .

And I think, I think, that the conscience within me is a primary thing. It speaks out of an impenetrable darkness but it is real. . . .

I have gone as deeply now as I am ever likely to go into the riddle of life. If I sat writing here in Paramé for a year I could add nothing to what I have already written. I should just sing the same song with variations, round and round. Indeed is not all

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this book a string of variations on a thread of events? This now shall be the finale. I know now where I stand. Stoical agnosticism is the only possible religion for sane adults. Accept and endure what happens to you, from within just as much as from without. Do what is right in your own eyes, for there is no other guide. Go on. Go on to your end. Go on without either absolutes of believing or disbelieving, without extremities either of hope or despair. . . .

### § 7

(*Alençon, October 2nd, 1934*)

A beautiful day and I have spent it very pleasantly. Until the afternoon I remained in Paramé, I re-read this diary of mine and thought and then wrote, thinking rather than writing, I attempted a sort of Confession of Faith – a solemn conscientious effort. Then seized by a sudden restlessness and finding I wrote no more, I started for Paris.

At any rate I told myself I was starting for Paris. But I did not take the direct road for Paris. Instead I motored straight across country to Rennes. I did not hesitate at any turnings. I think it was the memory of that first evening I spent there that made me deflect my course to the right instead of going straight back. It was not a long détour. The place had acquired personality in the retrospect and now it beckoned to me.

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Rennes, I found, was still Rennes. It came out to meet me and assimilated me forthwith. But now the days are shortening and it was all lit up, a sort of twilight illumination, as if in readiness for me. The shops were shutting up. The evening was agreeably warm and the place was full of dim young couples and dusky movement. It saw to all my needs with the same cheerful matter-of-fact kindliness of my first entertainment. The café outside the Hotel de Ville gave me dinner again, I had the same waiter and the same red-shaded lamp, the band still played in the café on the Vilaine, shut in a little now by glass, and by a happy chance, the bronze Brittany whom I had always remembered very pleasantly came down to earth, as it were, and lived again for me.

But this time I did not keep aloof. I found she was as simple and gay and friendly as her face. She was completely extrovert, amused with life and taking things as she found them. Maybe it will be good to return to Rennes and that essential sensual innocence of the seventeenth century ever and again. Maybe it might be better if men and women never met except incidentally, and were not obliged by all sorts of secondary considerations to pursue and enslave each other. How little they would know about each other, how freely their imaginations would dance in their duet and how brightly and lightly they would love each other! I slept at last very sweetly in Rennes. I slept late this morning. I was reluctant to leave the place but I did not want to spoil it by remaining over long.

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I am writing this last note to my book now in the Paraclete Hotel, Alençon, on the way to settling up my affairs in Paris. I came on here in the late afternoon, dining very simply but agreeably, drinking some excellent claret and avoiding that tête de veau.

My plans are quiet definite. I am going to dispose of our apartment and all its chic and oriental furnishings, throw out the Schweitzers, reinstate the Benniels as my cook and chauffeur in a bachelor flat after my own heart, and then return to London for a time to work hard, to work really hard and put things into an altogether bolder and more definite shape.

I am, I perceive, by all current standards, a moral pachyderm, for in spite of all that has happened, in spite of the death of Dolores and loneliness and futile love impulses and a deepening realization of my own essential triviality, I find myself emerging to-day into a state of contentment with Brittany, myself and the universe.

(‘Mais, M’sieu! votre deuil!’)

Contentment it is, peace of the nerves and steadiness of purpose. The peculiar magic of this road has not deserted it. I came along it sixty-odd days ago in a state of hope and elation that was then inexplicable, and I find myself still remembered. I have seen half of it now in reverse and it is just as pleasant in reverse and more golden than ever, a road of complacency and benediction.

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### § 8

Since I started out upon this road my life, my circumstances, my habits of thought, seem all to have been made over. How can I estimate the change as yet? I have found myself out and come to a new veracity. It is good to have this probable crime sticking in my mind. I am released not only from the immense entanglement of Dolores but also from a certain pedantic private scrupulousness that was half timidity and indecision, and from what threatened to become a rather clammy sentimentality about Lettice. There was a grain of rightness, a needle point of penetration, in Dolores' hostility to that relationship. How she would have rejoiced at my absurd disappointment! All that is to the good.

I have, I realize, no sorrow and no remorse whatever about the death of Dolores. It has an effect of being not so much a fact as the sudden removal of a fact. Even if my curious suspicion about that Semondyle is justified; still I have neither regret nor remorse. If I were to be put back to the moment when I finished writing about the fisherman and his reflections upon womankind, and went along to the corridor to her, would I do it – if I did do it – again?"

I would.

Yes. Even if I did not do it then; now after reflection I should certainly do it quite deliberately. I am happy, I am glad beyond measure to find myself

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free from her and to think that she is free from herself.

It has turned out so well. There was nothing more left for Dolores but to go on and on from bad to worse, getting harder and sharper and viler. No one could help her. She was damned. She was Calvinistically damned from the very beginning. She had already become like a dust eddy on a sultry day, no good even as ventilation. She would have made an incredibly awful old woman. They might have treated her as a madwoman. She and the world have been saved that anyhow. I am sorry for her; but it is her way of living I am sorry for and not her dying. She has ceased from troubling, the fever of her appetites is appeased, her insatiable boasting perishes with her, she sleeps and now she will hurt and be hurt no more.

In the case of Stephen Wilbeck versus Dolores I condemn both parties, with a recommendation to mercy. Each had a wicked heart and if she was an uncontrollable scream, he was a deadly self-protective companion for her. If she was pseudo-oriental and addicted to every extremity of emotional exaggeration, he had a heart as cold as it was light. It was easy for him to turn away to that 'work' of his – which you will note has changed considerably in the telling as his tale has unfolded. He liked many things in her and he owed a considerable stimulation to her. That he would have admitted if she had let him.

In the serenity of another world, some still dream-world of motionless skies and tall rocks and trees and

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mirroring lakes, we two people might even come to condone one another.

In passing, that is. If we went into particulars the old sores would reopen.

Soon the still lakes would be ruffled by catspaws. The motionless skies and trees would be troubled, they would begin to sway about, clouds would gather and leaves fall. There would be uneasy sounds everywhere where silence had reigned. . . .

In the distance I should hear Bayard yapping once again. I should hear the old life reassembling itself.

T H E   E N D













